STARBLAZER

SPACE FICTION ADVENTURE IN PICTURES No. 124

20p

THE PLANET OF PRISMS HOUSED THE HOME OF A PREVIOUSLY UNKNOWN RACE WHO SOUGHT TO DOMINATE THE UNIVERSE...

THE CRYSTAL KILLERS

STARBLAZER

EARTH'S GLEAMING NEW GALACTIC EXPLORER, "SEAGULL", SLID THROUGH THE UNKNOWN REACHES OF DEEP SPACE. SEVERAL MONTHS HAD PASSED SINCE ITS TRIUMPHANT LAUNCHING FROM EARTH. THE REVOLUTIONARY NEW THRUSTERS HAD PROPELLED IT DEEPER INTO SPACE THAN MAN HAD EVER VENTURED. EVERYTHING THEY ENCOUNTERED WAS NEW TO THEIR EXPERIENCE, TOTALLY UNKNOWN TO THEIR COMPUTER'S PROGRAMMING . . .

The CRYSTAL KILLERS

ON THE FLIGHT DECK WAS TIM RYAN, A SCOUT SHIP PILOT, GRANDSON OF GULL RYAN, A FAMOUS SPACE EXPLORER AFTER WHOM THE MAGNIFICENT SHIP HAD BEEN NAMED.

EXCITING DAYS AHEAD, MAX! WE'RE REALLY FLYING INTO THE UNKNOWN.

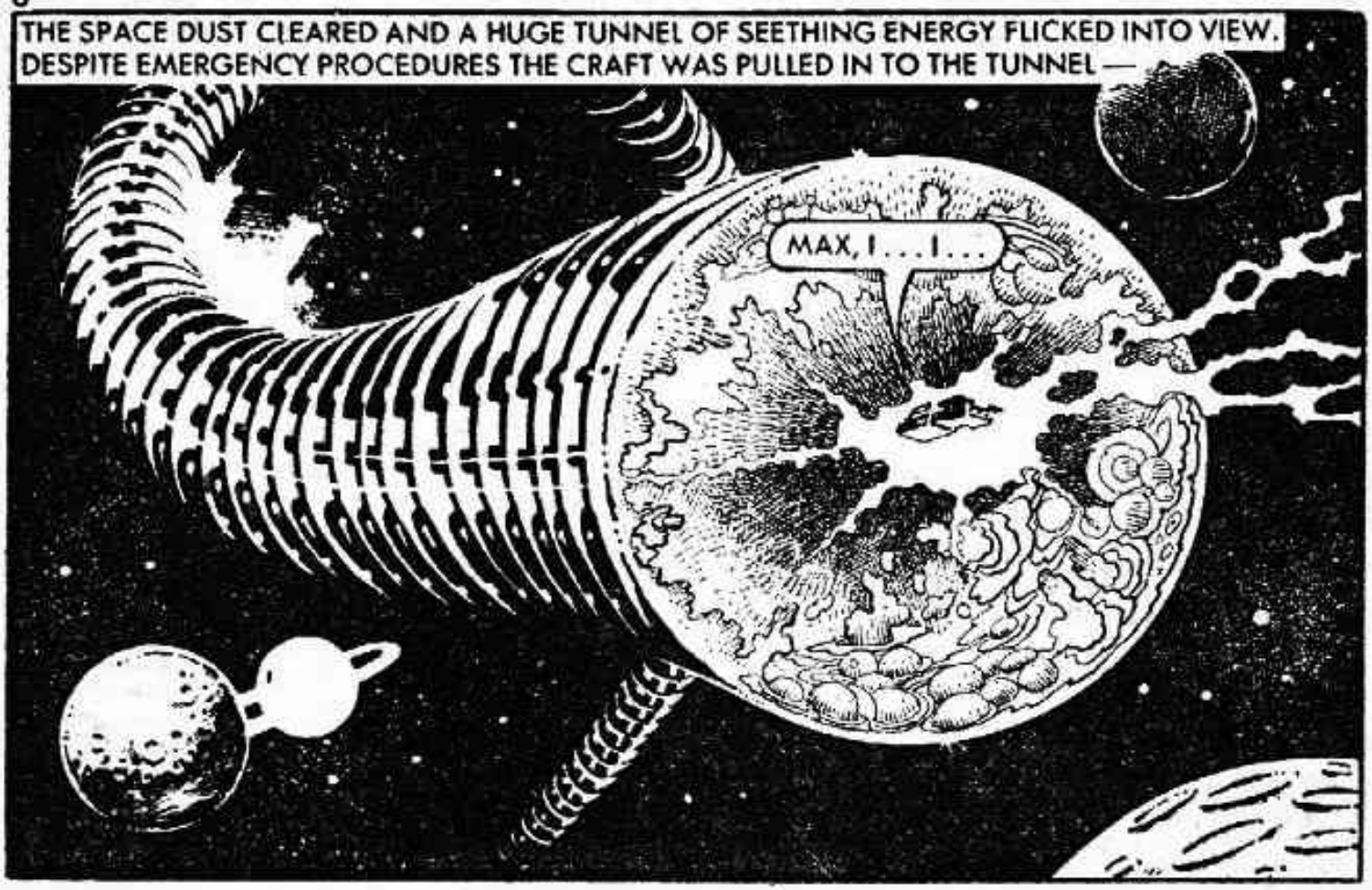
TIM AND HIS NAVIGATOR, MAX, BLASTED OUT IN THEIR SCOUTSHIP

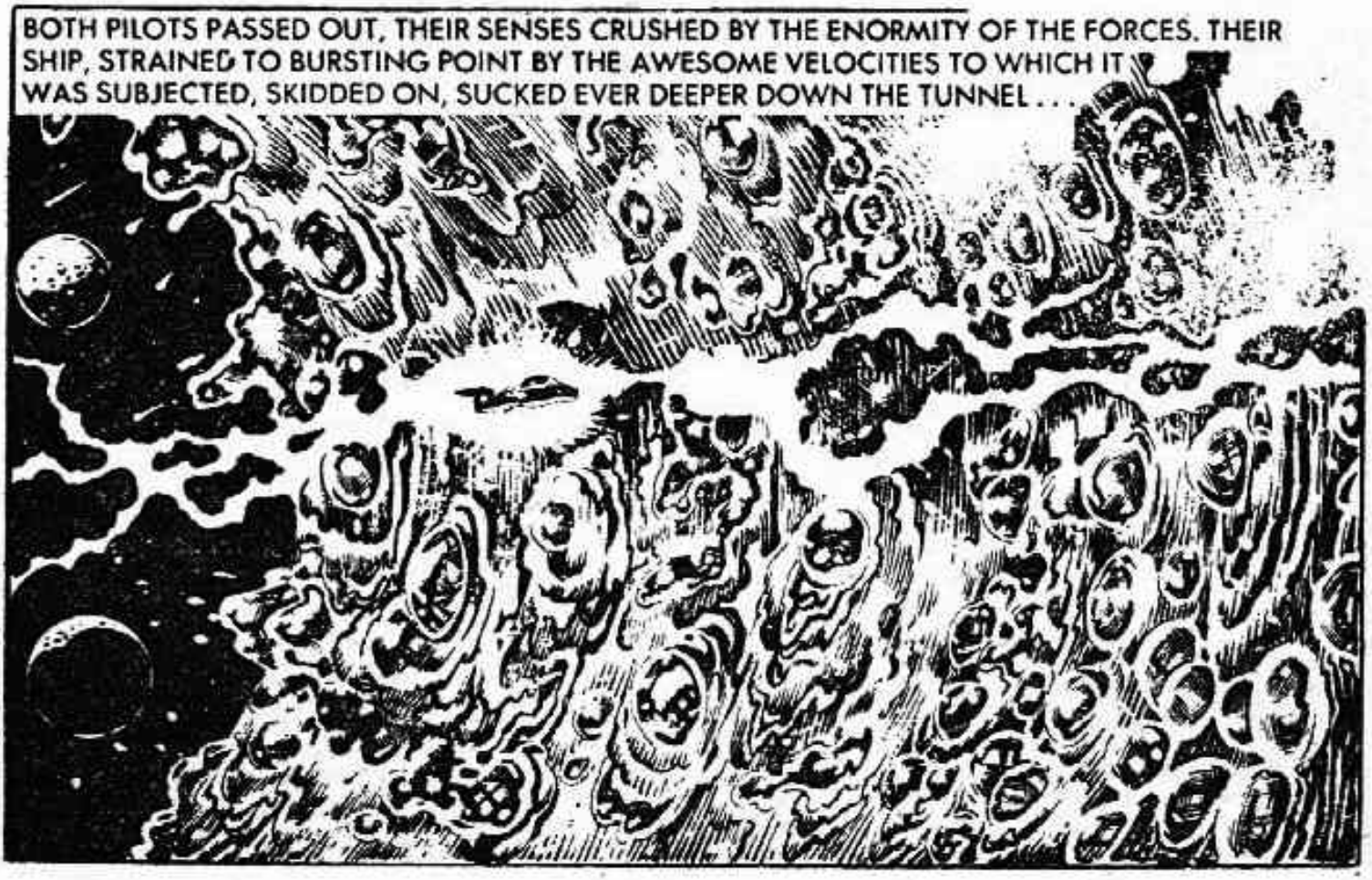
MY GRANDFATHER MIGHT HAVE REACHED HERE! I WONDER JUST HOW FAR HE TRAVELLED. DID HE GET THIS FAR? COMMUNICATIONS IN THOSE DAYS WERE VERY CRUDE AND LIMITED . . .

HE JUST VANISHED, DIDN'T HE? AFTER LEAVING SECTOR TWO? WELL, IF THE CRAFT DIDN'T BLOW UP, IT COULD HAVE JUST KEPT GOING ON AND ON AND ON.

MAX SWITCHED ON THE COMPUTER THAT FED EVERY SCRAP OF DATA ON THE SPACE THROUGH WHICH THEY PASSED BACK TO THE FLAGSHIP.
I'VE OFTEN WONDERED ABOUT HIM! BRAVE OLD GUY, BUT A BIT RECKLESS THEY TELL ME.

SUDDENLY —
WHAT IN JUPITER IS GOING ON?
INSTRUMENTS ARE ALL GOING CRAZY . . .


THE SPACE DUST CLEARED AND A HUGE TUNNEL OF SEETHING ENERGY FLICKED INTO VIEW. DESPITE EMERGENCY PROCEDURES THE CRAFT WAS PULLED IN TO THE TUNNEL —
MAX, I . . . I . . .

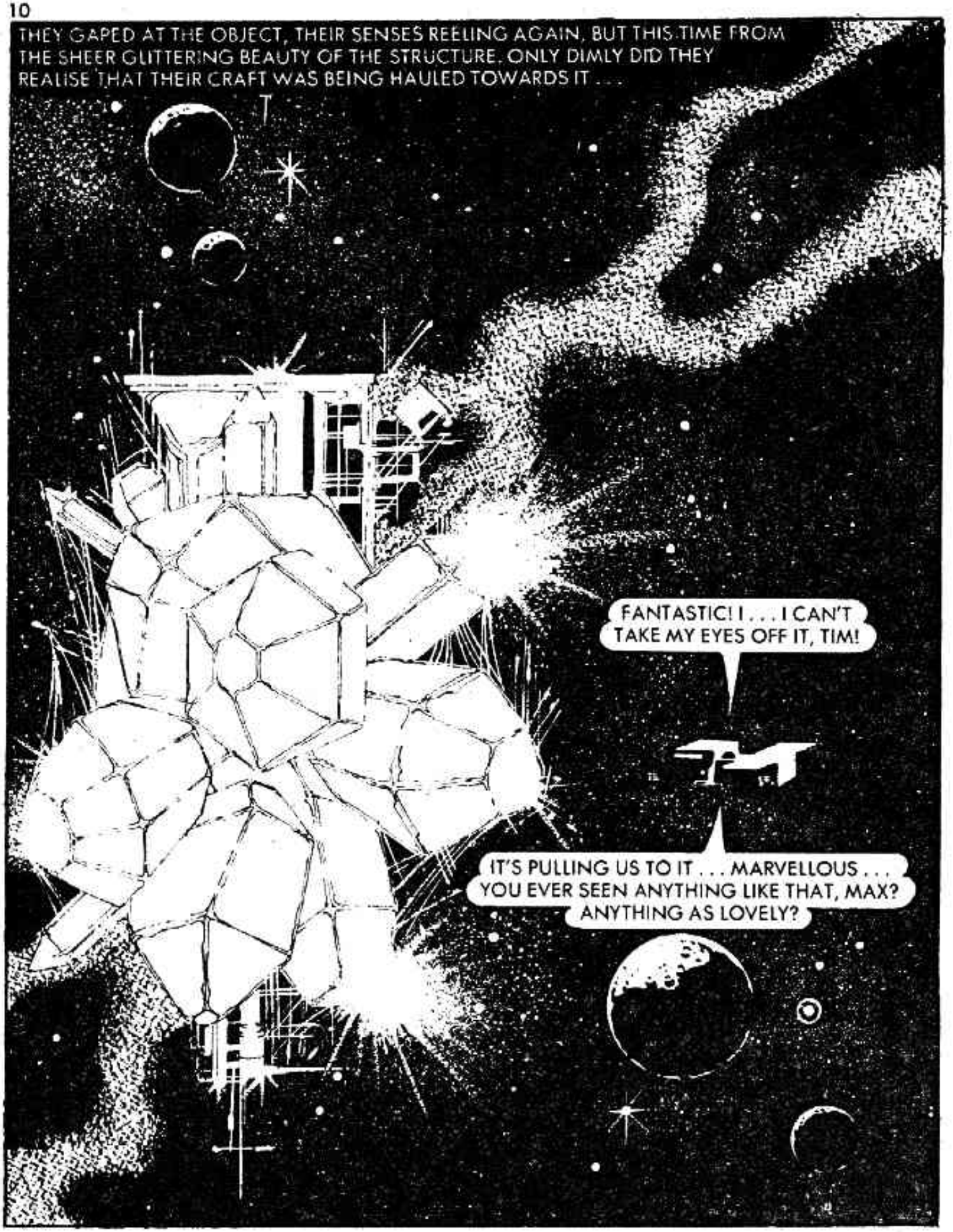

BOTH PILOTS PASSED OUT, THEIR SENSES CRUSHED BY THE ENORMITY OF THE FORCES. THEIR SHIP, STRAINED TO BURSTING POINT BY THE AWESOME VELOCITIES TO WHICH IT WAS SUBJECTED, SKIDDED ON, SUCKED EVER DEEPER DOWN THE TUNNEL . . .

THE SCOUT SHIP VANISHED ABRUPTLY OFF ALL VIDEO SCREENS ABOARD SEAGULL —
LOOK AT THIS DATA . . . UNBELIEVABLE! FORCE K . . . NEVER SEEN IT BEFORE. VELOCITY READING HAS FROZEN AT THE TOP OF THE SCALE.
THEY WOULDN'T HAVE STOOD A CHANCE! MUST HAVE BEEN LIKE FLYING INTO A SOLID WALL.
NO SIGNALS BEING SENT OUT BY DEBRIS. STRANGE! NO ALIEN OBJECTS PERCEIVED?
NOTHING, SIR. JUST SPACE . . . THEN SUDDENLY A FORCE K.

POOR DEVILS! YOUNG TIM WAS LIKE A SON TO ME, EVER SINCE HIS FATHER DIED ON A MISSION WE DID TOGETHER TO CIRUS SIX. SPACE TRAVEL HAS CERTAINLY TAKEN ITS TOLL OF THE RYANS.
BUT AT THE OTHER END OF THE TUNNEL —
MAX, YOU . . . OKAY?
I . . . I'M ALIVE! JUST! WHERE THE ASIMOV ARE WE? WHAT HAPPENED?

WE'RE OUT OF WHATEVER IT WAS THAT CAUGHT US . . . TOOK US TEN EARTH MINUTES TO PASS THROUGH IT.
LOOK AT IT, LIKE A TUNNEL! YOU MEAN WE CAME THROUGH THAT AND LIVED? READING IS FORCE K! TIM, HEAR THAT? FORCE K!! HOW DID WE DO IT?
FREED OF THAT MAELSTROM, THEIR INSTRUMENTS BEGAN TO WORK NORMALLY AGAIN.

SUDDENLY —
MAX, LOOK AT THAT!
HEY! IT'S LIKE A GIANT JEWEL HANGING IN THE SKY.


THEY GAPED AT THE OBJECT, THEIR SENSES REELING AGAIN, BUT THIS TIME FROM THE SHEER GLITTERING BEAUTY OF THE STRUCTURE. ONLY DIMLY DID THEY REALISE THAT THEIR CRAFT WAS BEING HAULED TOWARDS IT . . .
FANTASTIC! I . . . I CAN'T TAKE MY EYES OFF IT, TIM!
IT'S PULLING US TO IT . . . MARVELLOUS . . . YOU EVER SEEN ANYTHING LIKE THAT, MAX? ANYTHING AS LOVELY?

HYPNOTISED BY THE GIGANTIC CRYSTAL, THEY SAT AND STARED, NOT EVEN REALISING THAT THEIR CRAFT HAD STOPPED WITHIN THE STRUCTURE.
BEAUTIFUL...
UNBELIEVABLE!
ABRUPTLY, THE GLITTERING LIGHT BLACKED OUT.
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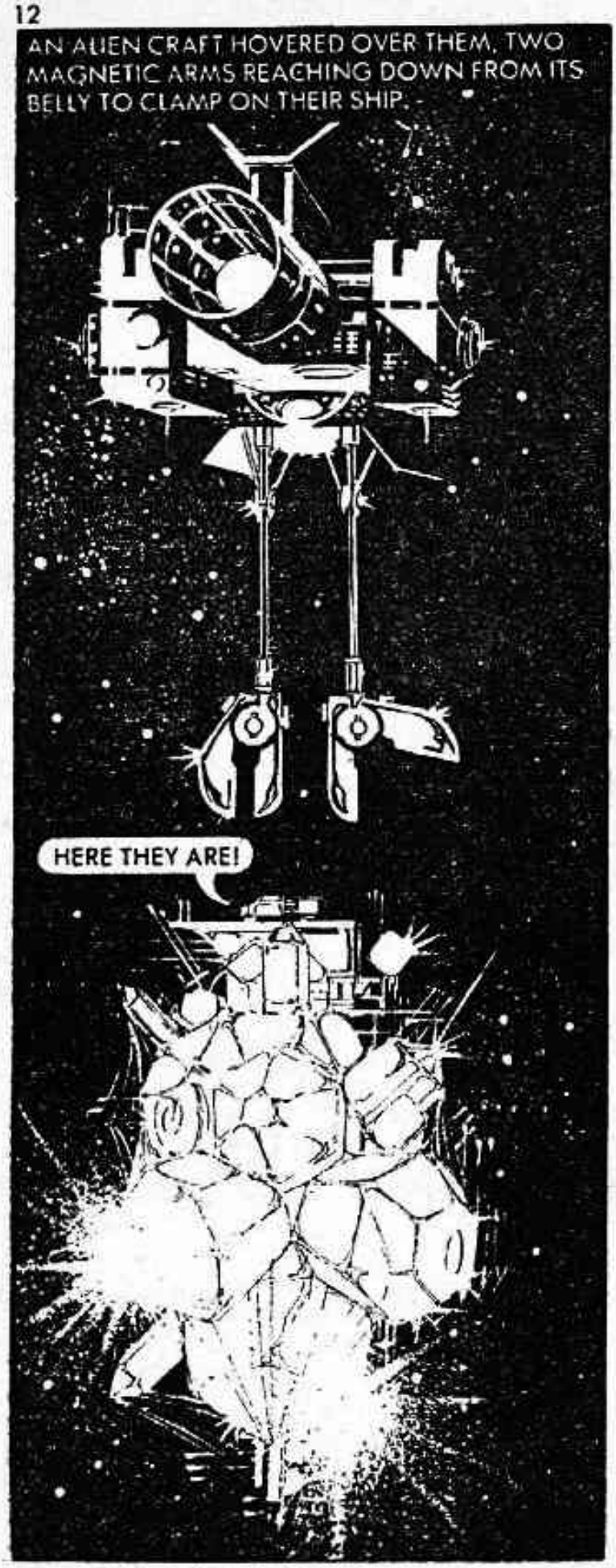
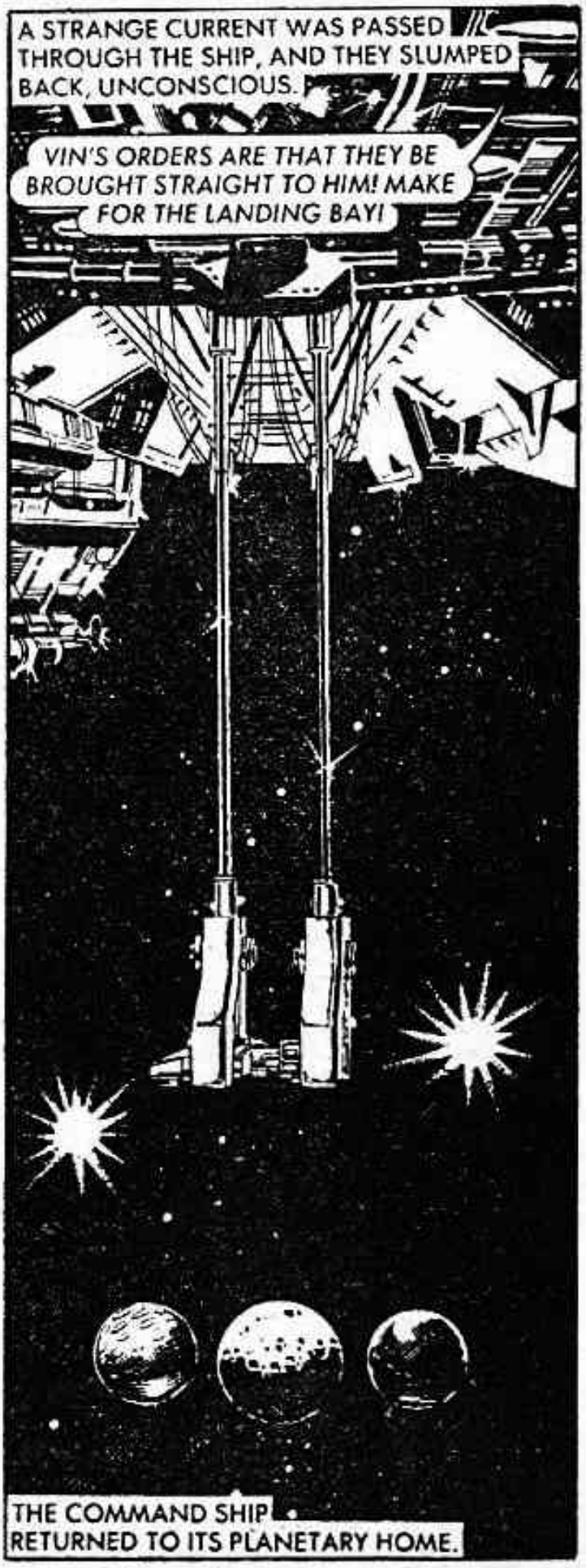
A TRAP! IT HAULS IN THE CRAFT AND WE SIT HERE NOT ABLE TO THINK OF ANYTHING BUT HOW INCREDIBLE IT IS.


AN ALIEN CRAFT HOVERED OVER THEM, TWO MAGNETIC ARMS REACHING DOWN FROM ITS BELLY TO CLAMP ON THEIR SHIP.
HERE THEY ARE!


A STRANGE CURRENT WAS PASSED THROUGH THE SHIP, AND THEY SLUMPED BACK, UNCONSCIOUS.
VIN'S ORDERS ARE THAT THEY BE BROUGHT STRAIGHT TO HIM! MAKE FOR THE LANDING BAY!
THE COMMAND SHIP RETURNED TO ITS PLANETARY HOME.

WHEN THEY CAME TO THEY WERE IN A COMMAND ROOM WITH A NUMBER OF EVIL-LOOKING ALIENS.
WHAT IS THIS PLACE?
BE SILENT! YOU ARE IN THE PESENCE OF VIN, MIGHTY LEADER OF THE PLANETS. YOU SPEAK WHEN HE ASKS.
MAX WAS AWARE OF THE STRANGE METALLIC QUALITY OF THE VOICE WHICH ALWAYS INDICATED THE USE OF A STANDARD TRANSLATOR PACK.

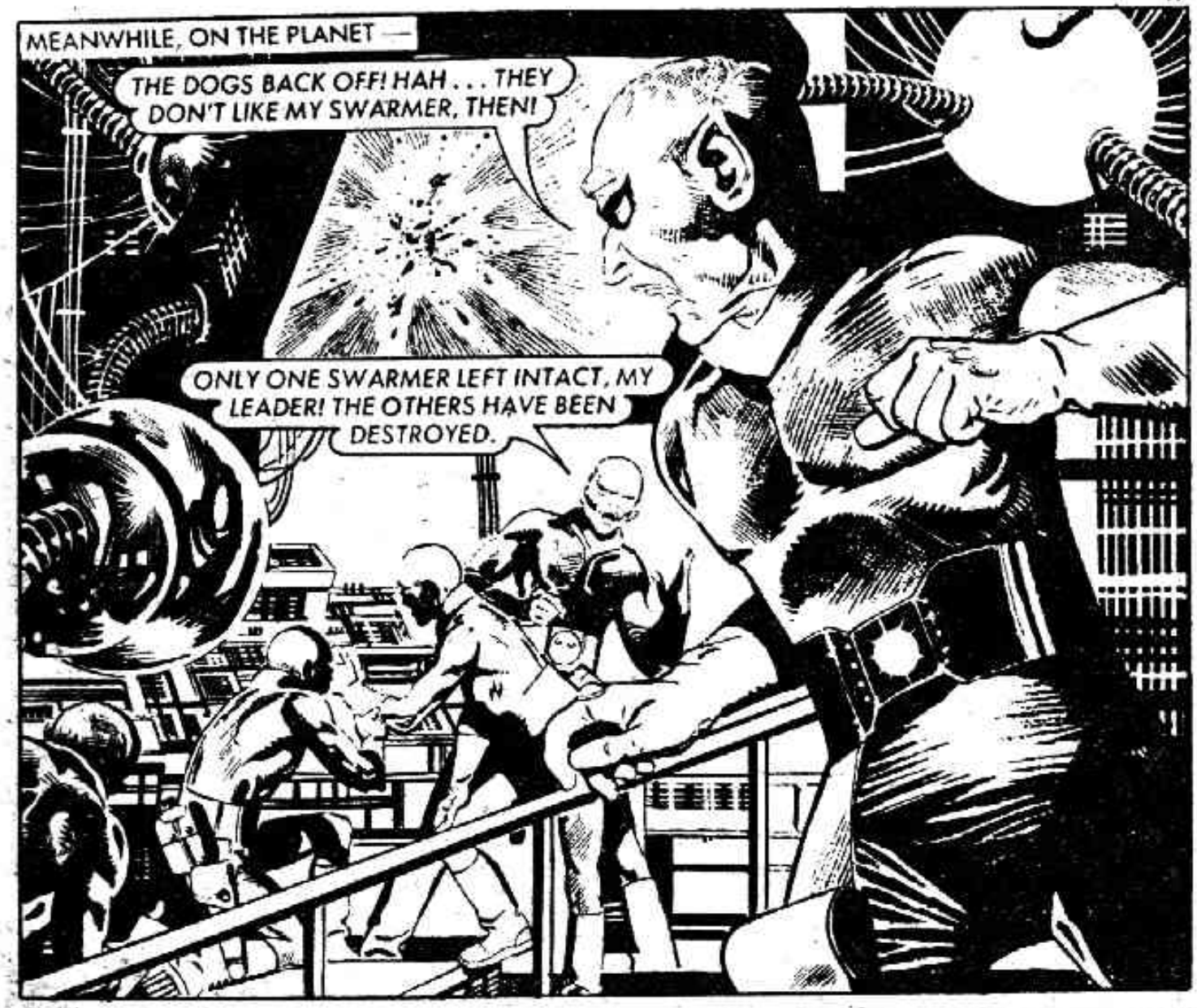
WHERE YOU FROM? HOW YOU SURVIVE THE TUNNEL? SPEAK!! HAVE NOT MUCH TIME TO WASTE ON YOU.
AN IMMENSE JEWEL WAS BURIED IN HIS FOREHEAD. EVERY NOW AND THEN IT SEEMED TO FLASH WITH A MALEVOLENT LIGHT.

BUT BEFORE THE QUESTIONING COULD GO ANY FURTHER, A DESPERATE MESSAGE SHRILLED THROUGH THE COMMLINK —
GREAT VIN . . . THE SPIDERMEN ARE ATTACKING US!
PUT THE PRISONERS IN THE MIND-PROBE! CALL MY FORCES TO ALERT. WHAT IS IT, A PATROL OF THE DEVILS?
HAVE THE DEFENDING SECTOR REPORT TO ME AFTER THIS SKIRMISH! NOW . . . RELEASE MY NEW SWARMER! I WANT THESE DEVILS TORN FROM MY SPACE!

VIN'S LASER SWARMER WAS QUICKLY PUT INTO ACTION. DOZENS OF SILVER NEEDLES CATAPULTED INTO THE SKY TOWARDS THE ATTACKERS. THE NEEDLES, EACH ONE ELECTRONICALLY-GUIDED, SOUGHT OUT AN ENEMY CRAFT . . .

. . . AND EXPLODED WITH A FURY OF A DOZEN NUCLEAR BOMBS AT THE MOMENT OF IMPACT, LITERALLY TEARING THE SPIDER CRAFT APART . . .

BUT THE SPIDERMEN HAD SOME AWESOME WEAPONS OF THEIR OWN. HEAT DUST RAINED UPON THE DEFENDERS, CONSUMING THEM UTTERLY, IN SECONDS, THEIR WEAPONS WITH THEM.
RELEASE ANOTHER WEB. THEN RETIRE!
HIGH ABOVE, THE SPIDER CRAFT SHOT OUT VAST ELECTRONIC WEBS THAT TRAPPED THE ATTACKING SHIPS, SENDING A SAVAGE CURRENT THROUGH THE METAL OF THE CRAFT, SHOCKING TO DEATH ALL OCCUPANTS, KNOCKING OUT EVERY CONTROL, EVERY INSTRUMENT.


MEANWHILE, ON THE PLANET —
THE DOGS BACK OFF! HAH . . . THEY DON'T LIKE MY SWARMER, THEN!
ONLY ONE SWARMER LEFT INTACT, MY LEADER! THE OTHERS HAVE BEEN DESTROYED.

VIN WATCHED AS THE SPIDER CRAFT RACED AWAY EASILY OUT-PACING HIS OWN WAR SHIPS —
THEY ARE MORE ADVANCED THAN I AM . . . THEY MUST WIN IN THE END! THAT IS WHY THESE STRANGERS ARE IMPORTANT TO ME . . . I MUST FIND A ROUTE OUT THROUGH THE TUNNEL.

HE ORDERED TIM AND MAX TO BE BROUGHT IN, ALREADY HAVING THE RESULTS OF THEIR MIND PROBES.
YOU COME FROM A DISTANT PLANET CALLED EARTH . . . A PRIMITIVE PLACE ON THE RIM OF GALAXY NINE . . . TOO FAR EVEN TO BE COLONISED. YET . . . YOUR SHIP BROUGHT YOU THROUGH THE TUNNEL. YOUR ENGINEERS OBVIOUSLY KNOW A GREAT DEAL ABOUT METALS . . . DATA MY OWN NUMBSKULLS HAVE NOT YET MASTERED.
WHAT DO YOU PLAN TO DO WITH US? IS OUR SHIP STILL INTACT?
WE DEMAND TO BE RETURNED TO OUR OWN SECTOR OF SPACE.
YOU WILL BE DESTROYED. YOU ARE OF NO CONSEQUENCE.

AT THAT POINT THE SECTOR TWO DEFENDERS WERE BROUGHT IN —
WE GO TO THE HALL OF FAILURE! LET THESE PRIMITIVES WITNESS THE WAY I PUNISH INCOMPETENCE.

THEY WERE LED INTO A VAST CAVERN OF A ROOM, WHICH CONTAINED STRANGE STATUES.
YOU KNOW THE PRICE OF FAILURE. YOUR INCOMPETENCE HAS COST MANY LIVES, MANY WEAPONS OF WAR.

SO I, VIN, GREAT LEADER OF MY PEOPLE, SENTENCE YOU TO DIE IN THE LIGHT OF THE SYMBOL OF MY KINGSHIP!
THE JEWEL IN HIS FOREHEAD SUDDENLY BLAZED INTO LIFE.

ITS UNHOLY RADIANCE BATHED THE MEN, LIGHTING FOR ONE SECOND, THE FEAR IN THEIR EYES —
DIE, DOGS! DIE IN THE LIGHT OF MY POWER, MY AUTHORITY, MY KINGSHIP!

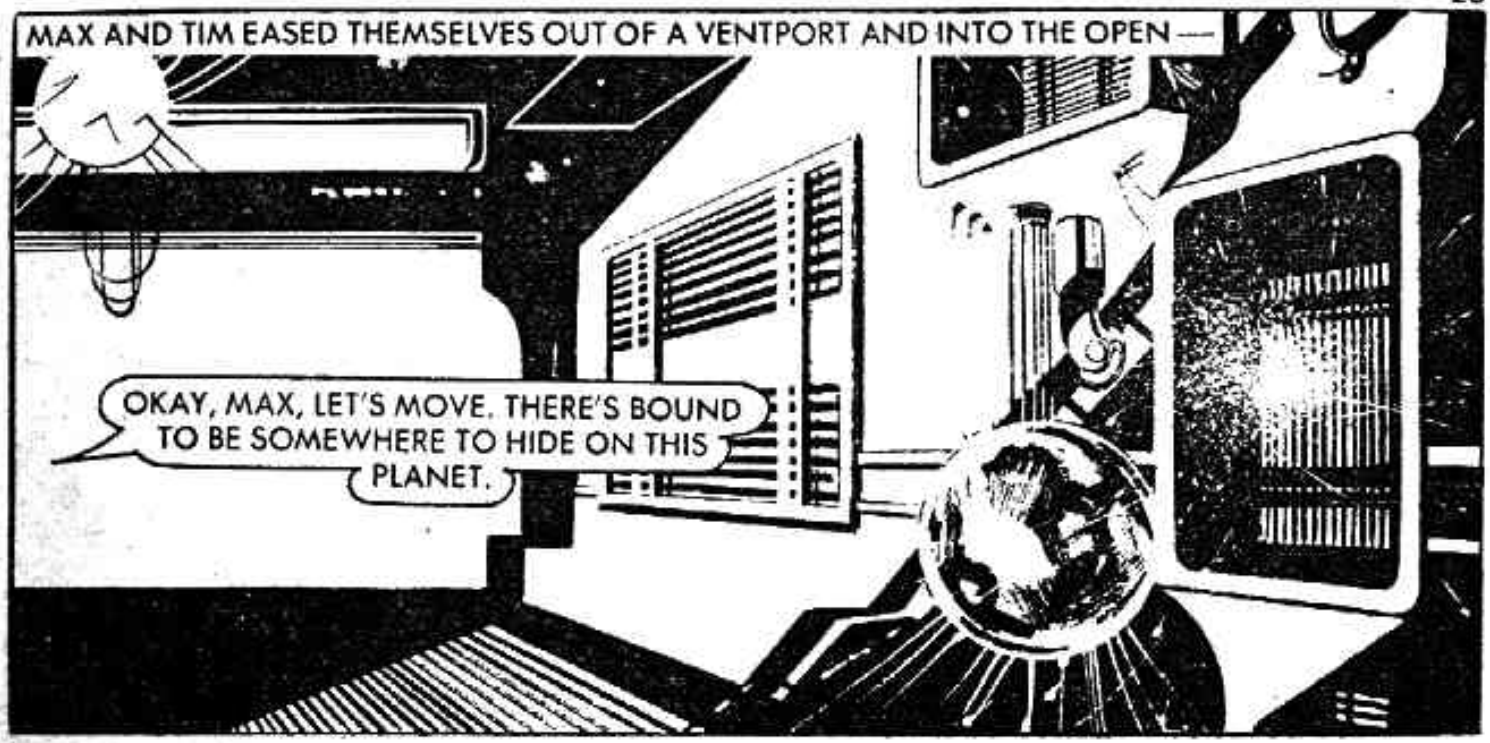
STAND WITH THE OTHER FAILURES . . . LET YOU BE TESTIMONY TO THE POWER OF VIN, GREAT LEADER OF THE STARS!
THE JEWEL IMPLANTED IN VIN'S FOREHEAD WAS A CONCENTRATOR, DESIGNED TO HARNESS THE POWER COLLECTED BY THE GIANT CRYSTAL WORLD.

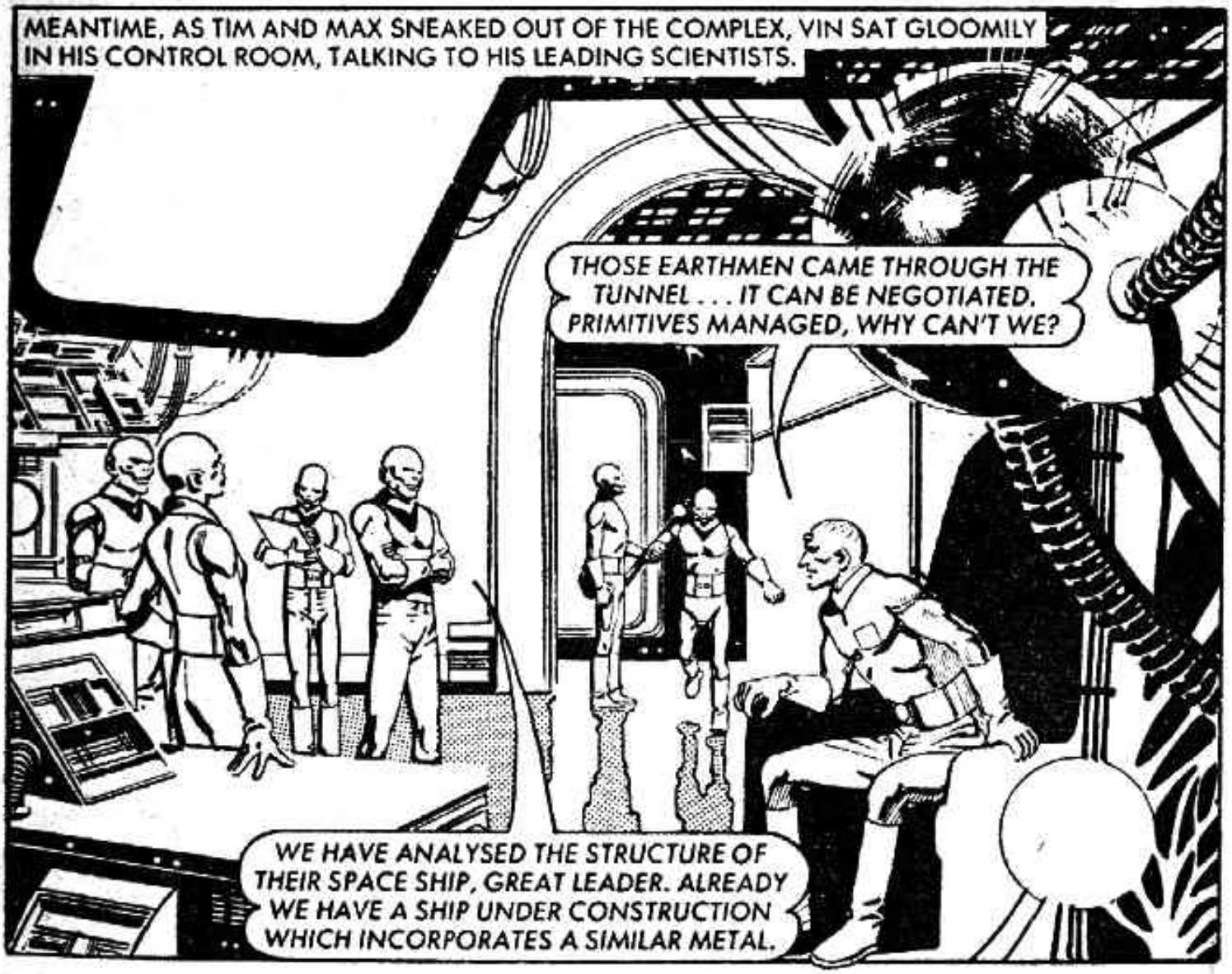
TAKE THE TERRANS! DESTROY THEM! MAKE SURE YOU DO NOT FAIL, OR YOU WILL SUFFER A SIMILAR FATE!
IT WILL BE DONE, GREAT LEADER!

THEY WERE ESCORTED TO A COLD DANK PASSAGE.
MAX, IT'S ABOUT TIME WE STARTED RESISTING!
WELL, I'M NOT GETTING IN THAT BOX, THAT'S FOR SURE.

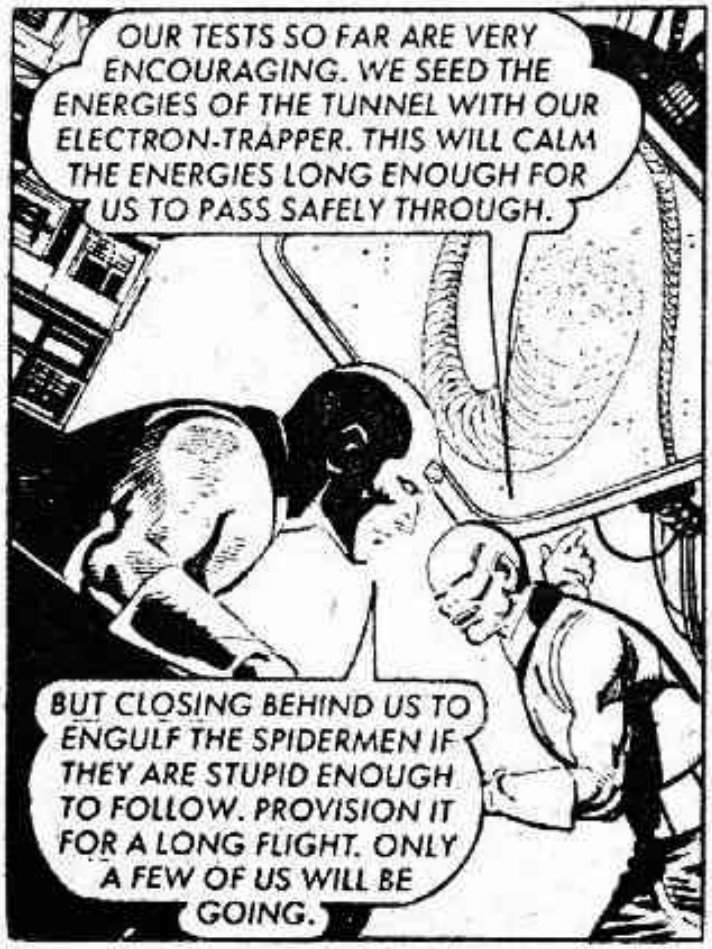
NOW!
THEY ACTED TOGETHER, TAKING THE GUARDS BY SURPRISE.

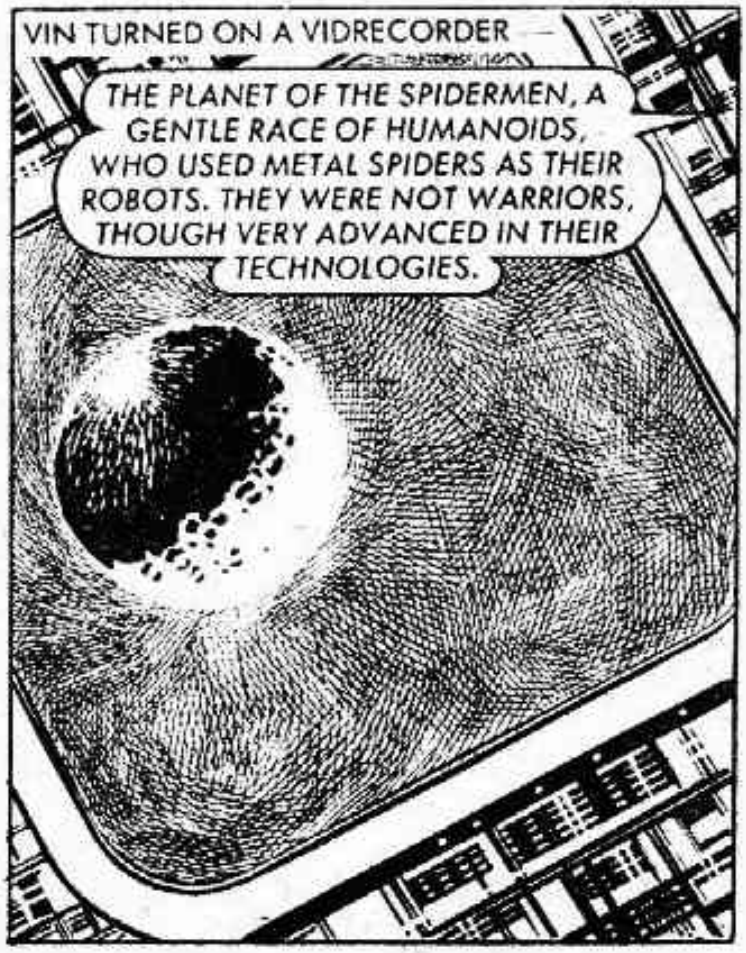
CHUCK THEM IN THE BOX . . . WE DON'T WANT THE ALARM RAISED UNTIL WE'RE WELL CLEAR OF THIS PLACE!


MAX AND TIM EASED THEMSELVES OUT OF A VENTPORT AND INTO THE OPEN —
OKAY, MAX, LET'S MOVE. THERE'S BOUND TO BE SOMEWHERE TO HIDE ON THIS PLANET.

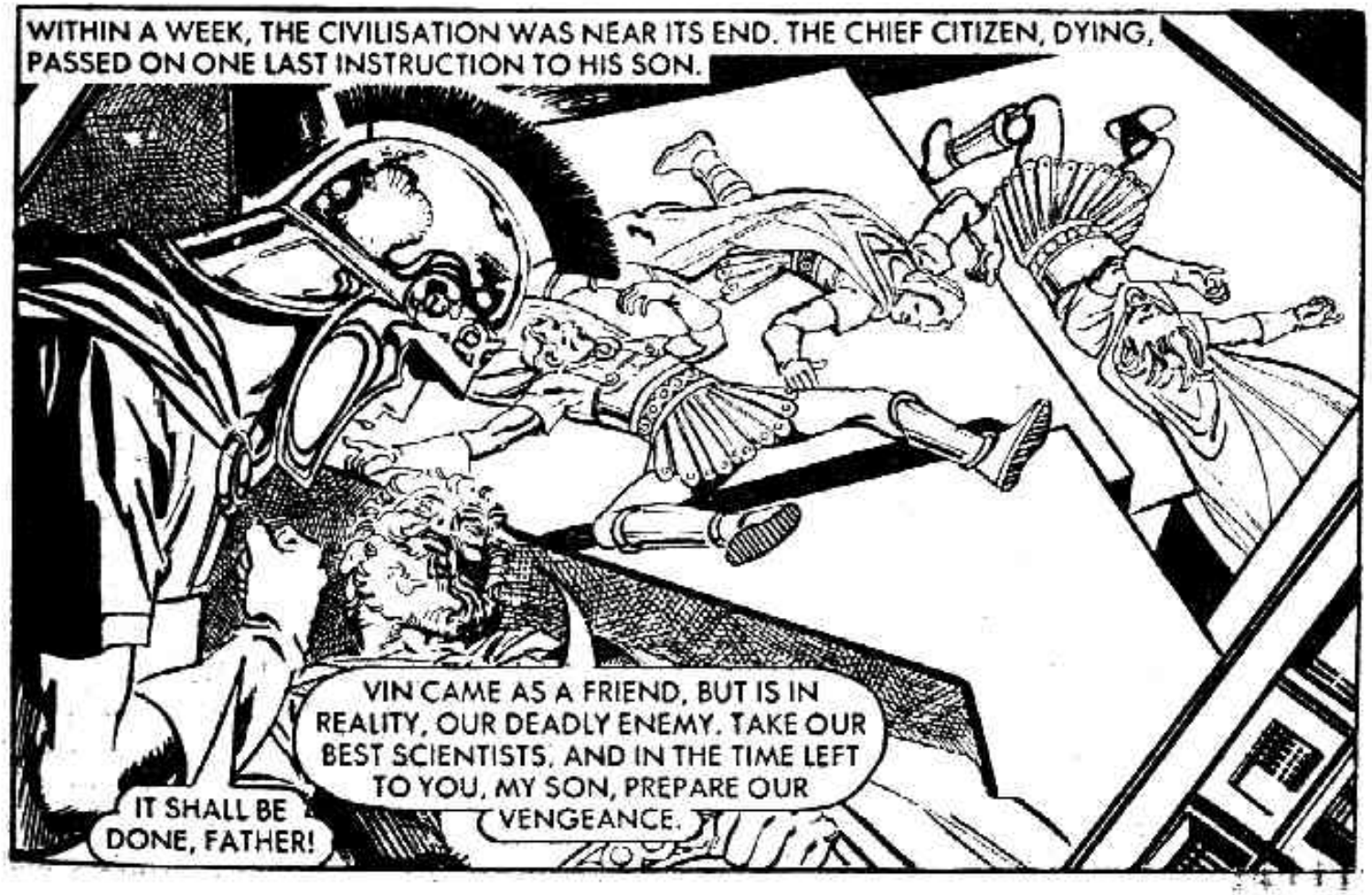

MEANTIME, AS TIM AND MAX SNEAKED OUT OF THE COMPLEX, VIN SAT GLOOMILY IN HIS CONTROL ROOM, TALKING TO HIS LEADING SCIENTISTS.
THOSE EARTHMEN CAME THROUGH THE TUNNEL . . . IT CAN BE NEGOTIATED. PRIMITIVES MANAGED, WHY CAN'T WE?
WE HAVE ANALYSED THE STRUCTURE OF THEIR SPACE SHIP, GREAT LEADER. ALREADY WE HAVE A SHIP UNDER CONSTRUCTION WHICH INCORPORATES A SIMILAR METAL.

ONLY SIMILAR?
WE CANNOT DUPLICATE IT EXACTLY, GREAT LEADER. WE LACK CERTAIN OF THE ELEMENTS. BUT ONCE WE START SEEDING THE TUNNEL AS PLANNED, WE CAN GET THROUGH SAFELY.
MAX AND TIM STRUGGLED IN THE THIN ATMOSPHERE SURROUNDING THE CRYSTAL PLANET.

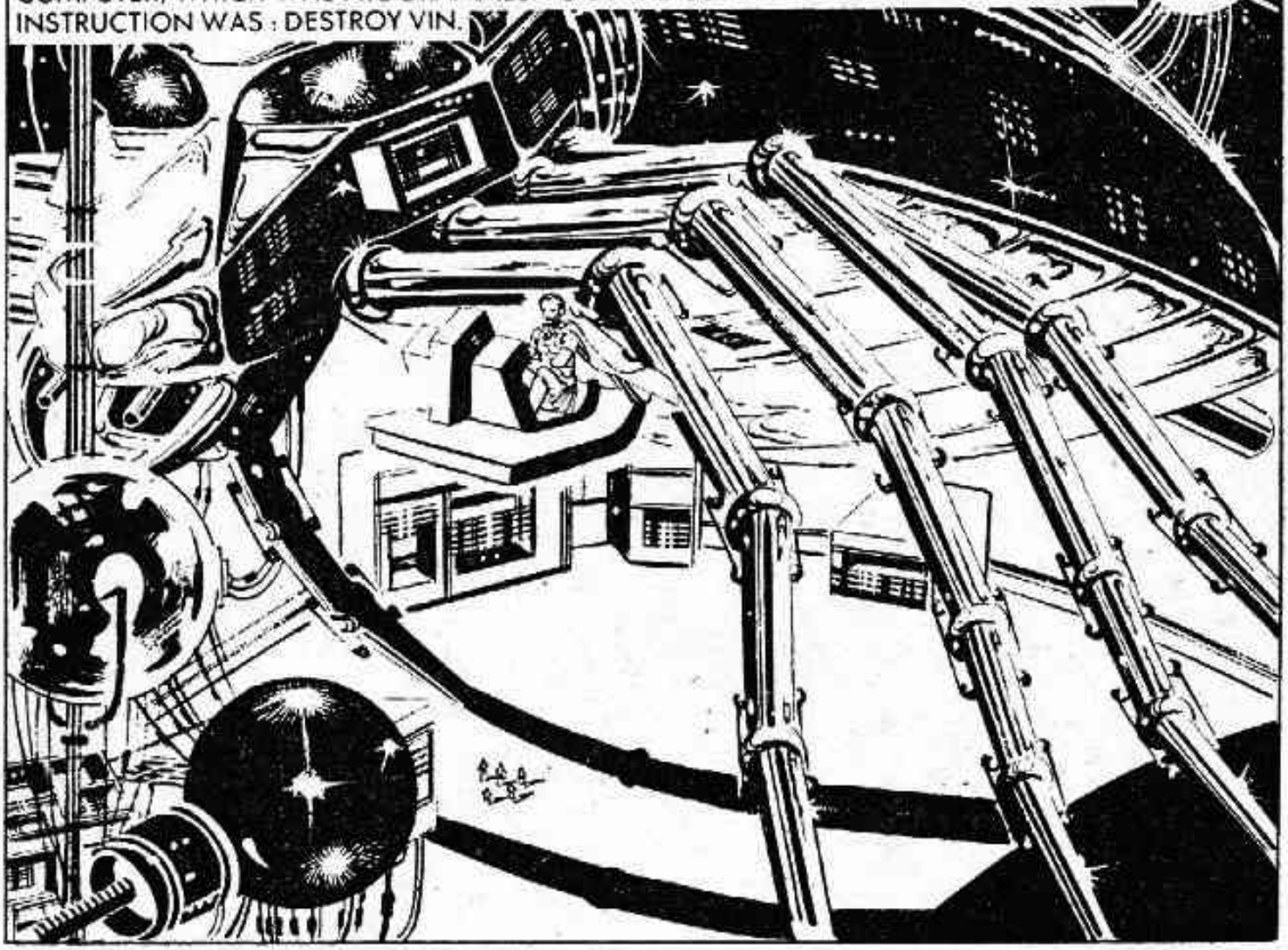

OUR TESTS SO FAR ARE VERY ENCOURAGING. WE SEED THE ENERGIES OF THE TUNNEL WITH OUR ELECTRON-TRAPPER. THIS WILL CALM THE ENERGIES LONG ENOUGH FOR US TO PASS SAFELY THROUGH.
BUT CLOSING BEHIND US TO ENGULF THE SPIDERMEN IF THEY ARE STUPID ENOUGH TO FOLLOW. PROVISION IT FOR A LONG FLIGHT. ONLY A FEW OF US WILL BE GOING.


VIN TURNED ON A VIDRECORDER —
THE PLANET OF THE SPIDERMEN, A GENTLE RACE OF HUMANOIDS, WHO USED METAL SPIDERS AS THEIR ROBOTS. THEY WERE NOT WARRIORS, THOUGH VERY ADVANCED IN THEIR TECHNOLOGIES.

I VISITED THE PLANET, PRETENDING FRIENDSHIP. MEANTIME, MY SCIENTISTS WERE BUSY ANALYSING THE METABOLISM OF THE INHABITANTS. THEY FOUND WHAT THEY WERE SEEKING. FROM THE MOMENT I LEFT, THE PEOPLE BEGAN TO DIE, VICTIMS OF A DEADLY VIRUS FOR WHICH THEY HAD NO ANTIDOTE. THE PEOPLE DIED LIKE FLIES.

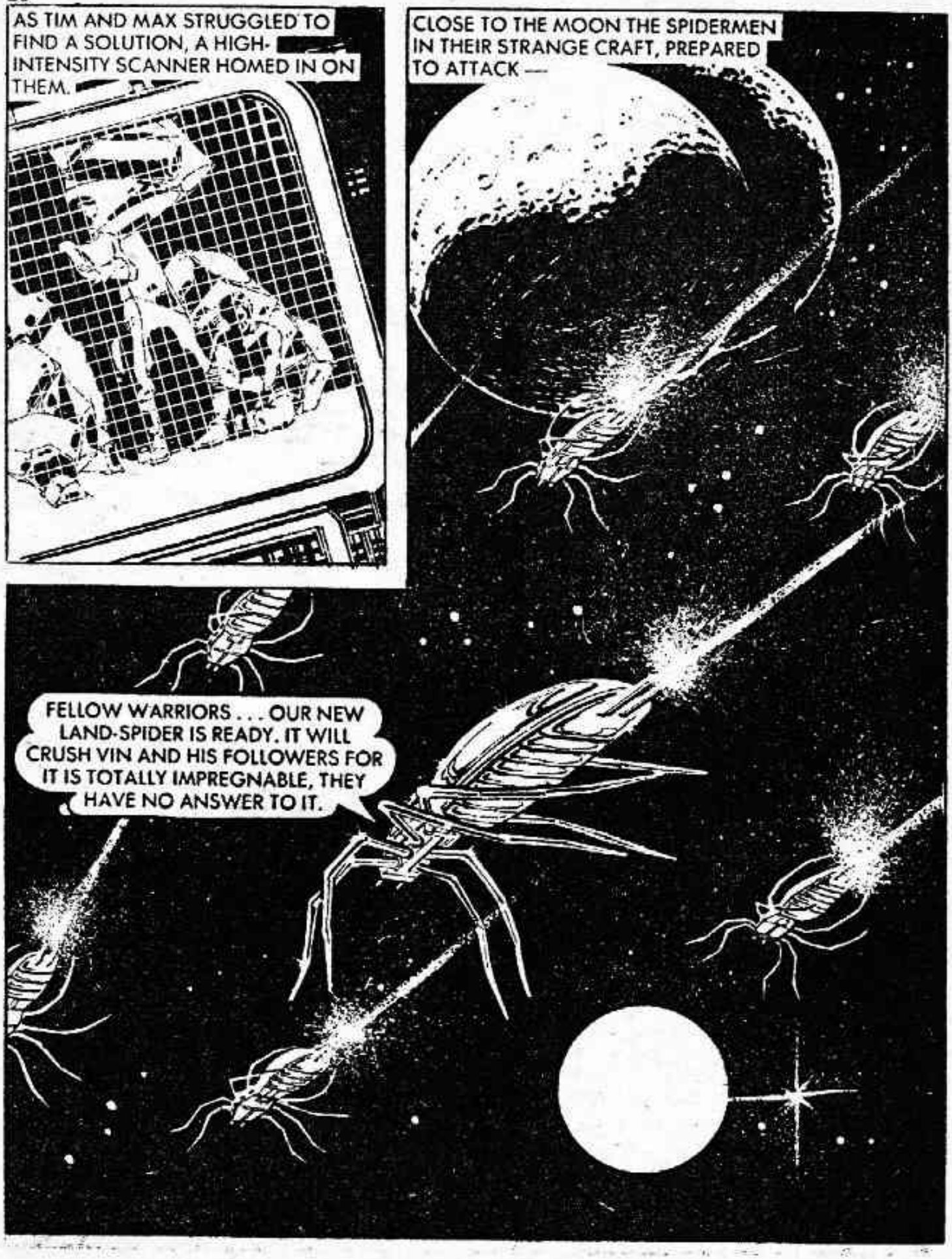

WITHIN A WEEK, THE CIVILISATION WAS NEAR ITS END. THE CHIEF CITIZEN, DYING, PASSED ON ONE LAST INSTRUCTION TO HIS SON.
VIN CAME AS A FRIEND, BUT IS IN REALITY, OUR DEADLY ENEMY. TAKE OUR BEST SCIENTISTS, AND IN THE TIME LEFT TO YOU, MY SON, PREPARE OUR VENGEANCE.
IT SHALL BE DONE, FATHER!

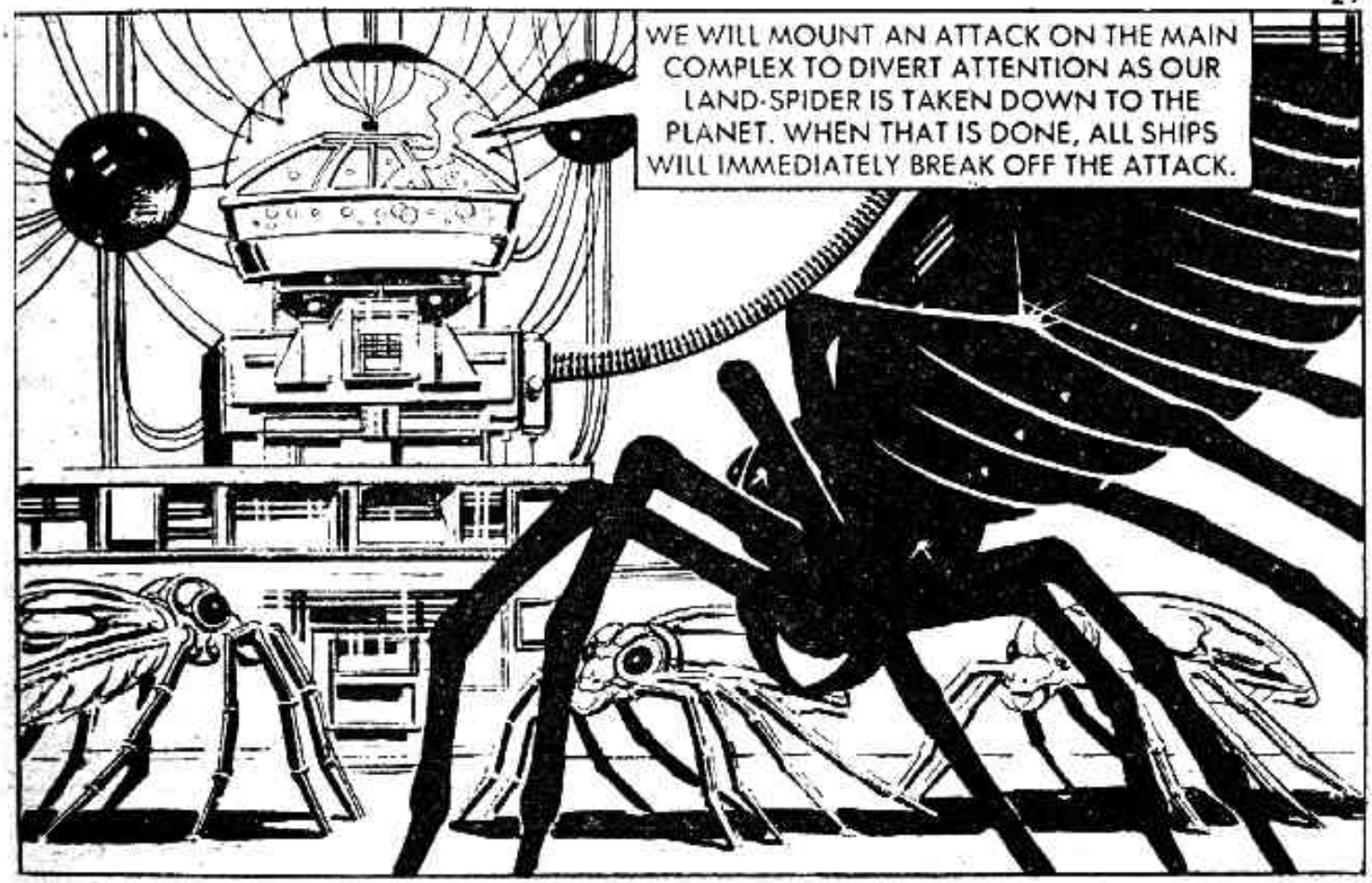
THE SON KEPT HIS WORD. THE PLANET'S FINEST SCIENTISTS JOURNEYED TO A REMOTE AREA WHERE THEY CREATED A FLEET OF SPIDERMEN SHIPS, EACH ONE ARMED WITH THE FINEST TECHNOLOGY. A MIGHTY FLAGSHIP WAS BUILT TO HOUSE THE CENTRAL [redacted] COMPUTER, WHICH WAS PROGRAMMED TO BE THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF. THE BASIC INSTRUCTION WAS : DESTROY VIN.

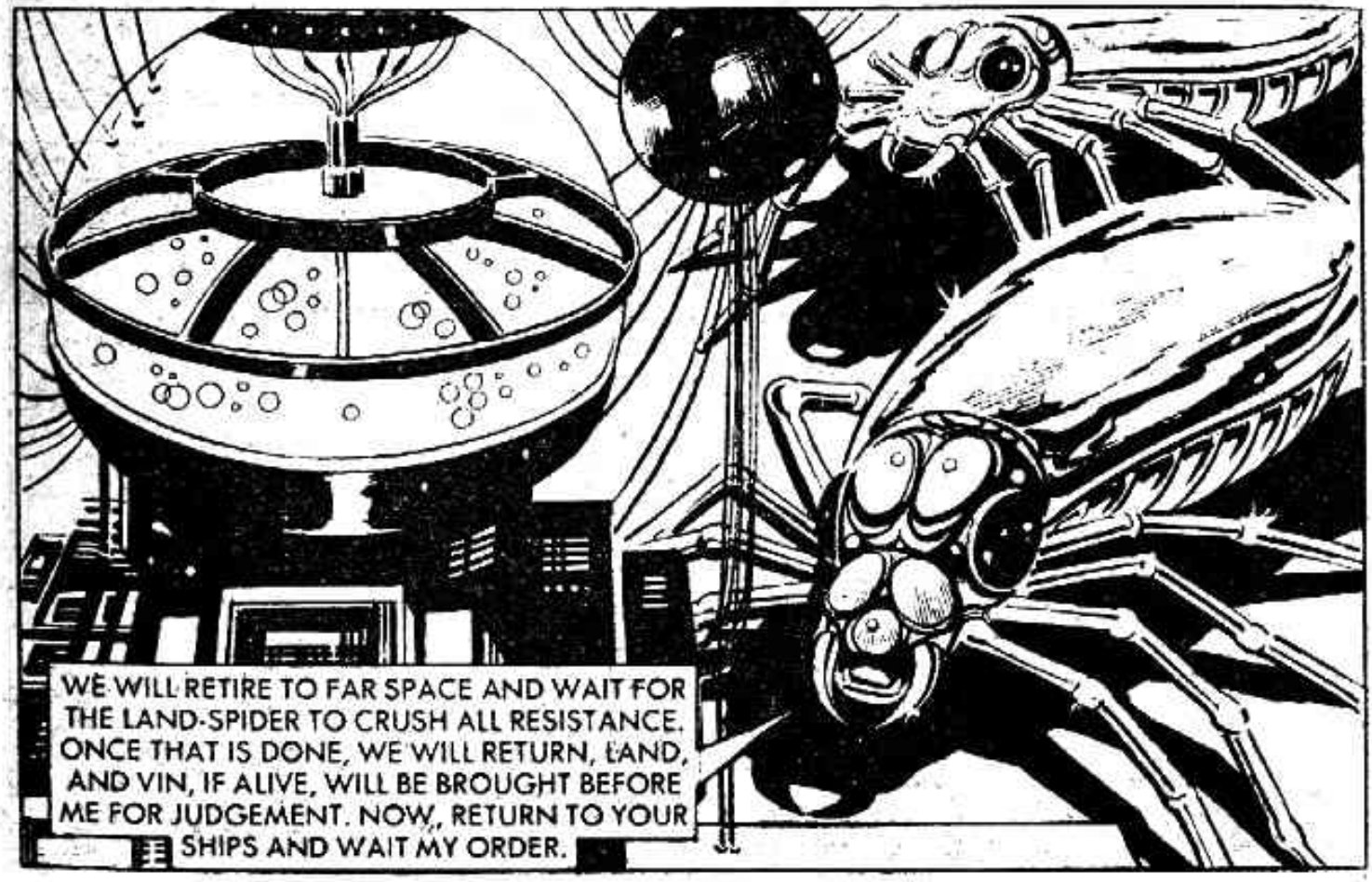


VIN SWITCHED OFF THE VIDEO TAPE.

CURSE THEM! I SHOULD HAVE MOVED IN AND BLOWN THEIR PLANET TO PIECES THE MOMENT WE HAD MINED ENOUGH USEFUL ORE. THAT WAS AN OVERSIGHT. I COULD HAVE DESTROYED THEM ALL, AND THEIR INFERNAL MACHINES!


AS TIM AND MAX STRUGGLED TO FIND A SOLUTION, A HIGH-INTENSITY SCANNER HOMED IN ON THEM.
CLOSE TO THE MOON THE SPIDERMEN IN THEIR STRANGE CRAFT, PREPARED TO ATTACK —
FELLOW WARRIORS . . . OUR NEW LAND-SPIDER IS READY. IT WILL CRUSH VIN AND HIS FOLLOWERS FOR IT IS TOTALLY IMPREGNABLE, THEY HAVE NO ANSWER TO IT.


WE WILL MOUNT AN ATTACK ON THE MAIN COMPLEX TO DIVERT ATTENTION AS OUR LAND-SPIDER IS TAKEN DOWN TO THE PLANET. WHEN THAT IS DONE, ALL SHIPS WILL IMMEDIATELY BREAK OFF THE ATTACK.


WE WILL RETIRE TO FAR SPACE AND WAIT FOR THE LAND-SPIDER TO CRUSH ALL RESISTANCE. ONCE THAT IS DONE, WE WILL RETURN, LAND, AND VIN, IF ALIVE, WILL BE BROUGHT BEFORE ME FOR JUDGEMENT. NOW, RETURN TO YOUR SHIPS AND WAIT MY ORDER.

IN A VAST HANGAR ABOARD THE FLAGSHIP, THE LAND-SPIDER WAS BEING ARMED FOR THE ATTACK —

STAND BY! HAVE THE LAND-SPIDER READIED.

THEN —
A SUN-PULSE BEAM SMASHED INTO THE GROUND CLOSE BY CONCUSSING THEM.
MINUTES LATER THE AWESOME LAND-SPIDER TOUCHED DOWN. ITS CREW OF SMALL ROBOTS WERE READY FOR ACTION —

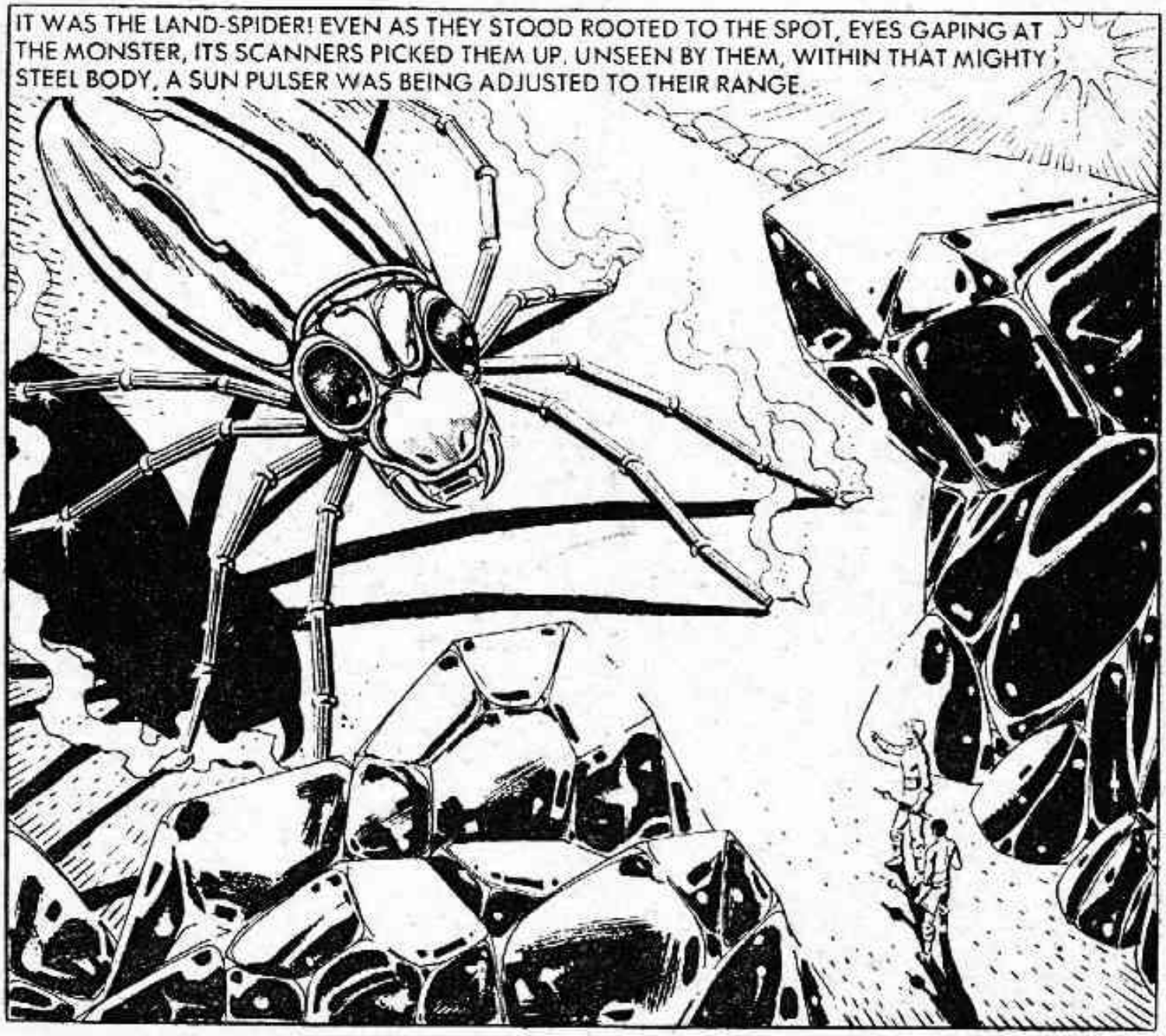
SOON THE PLANET'S SHORT NIGHT WAS OVER AND AS THE TWIN SUNS ROSE TO FLOOD THE HARSH LAND WITH LIGHT, THE LAND-SPIDER ENGAGED ITS FIRST ENEMY.
MEANTIME, VIN STOOD IN THE SHATTERED RUINS OF HIS CONTROL ROOM—
ORDER MY SWARMERS INTO ACTION!
LEADER, THE SPIDER SHIPS HAVE GONE! THEY'VE RETIRED! LOOK!

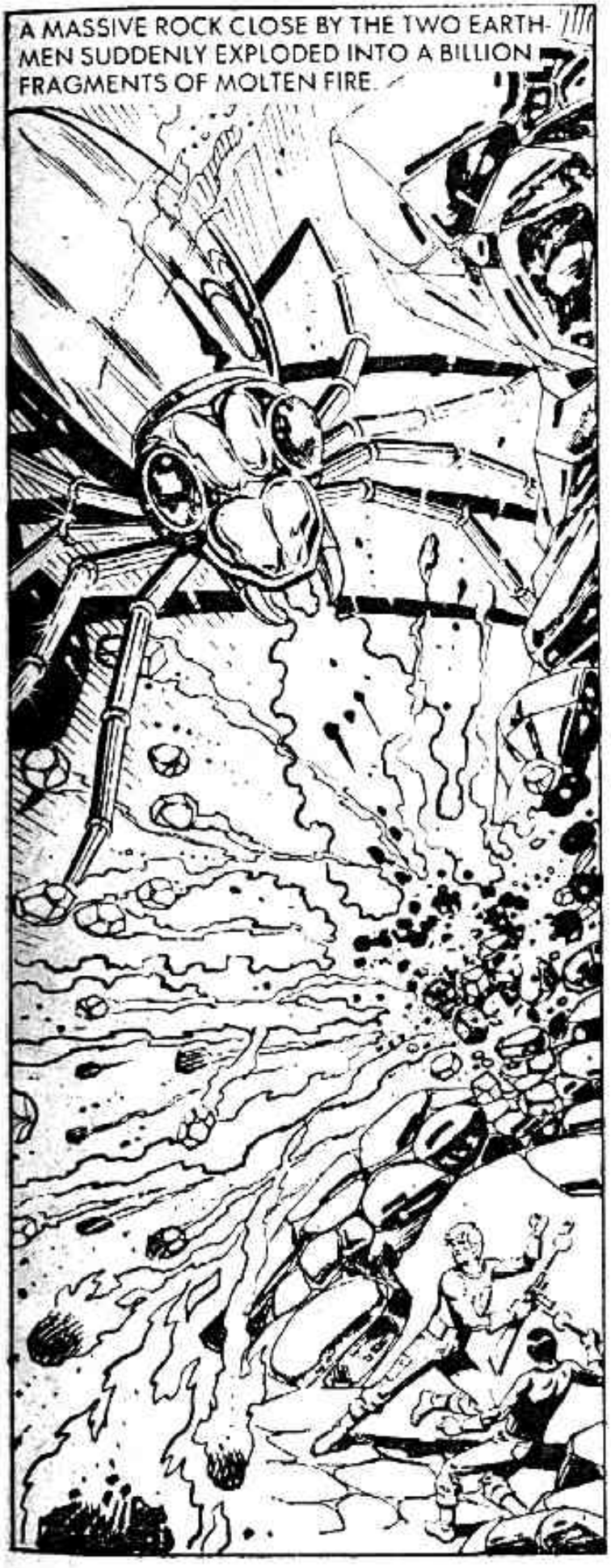
WHY? WHY RETIRE WHEN THEY HAD THE PLANET AT THEIR MERCY? WHAT TRICKERY ARE THEY PLANNING?

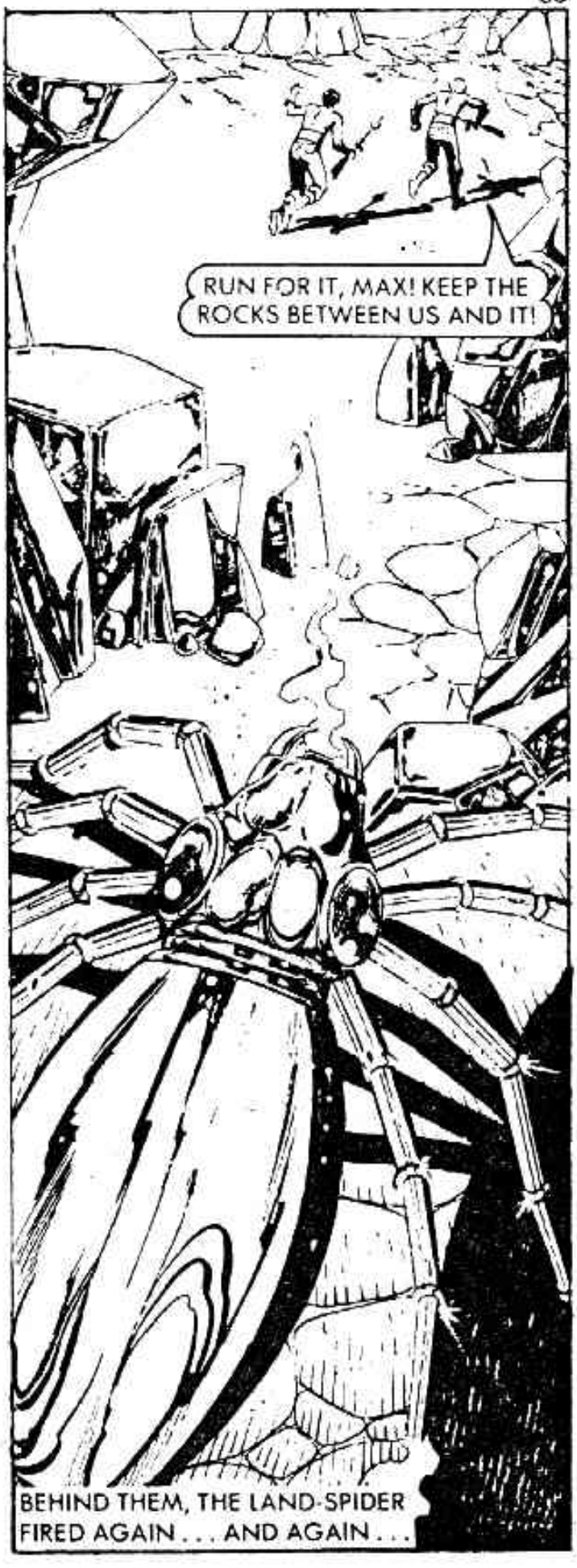
OH, LEADER! SHALL WE SEND OUT PARTIES NOW TO FIND THE TWO ESCAPED PRIMITIVES?
NO NEED! THEY WILL TRY TO SNEAK BACK TO THEIR SHIP FOR IT IS THEIR ONLY MEANS OF ESCAPE. HAVE MEN IN HIDING CLOSE TO IT . . . WHEN THEY APPROACH, DESTROY THEM.

TIM AND MAX, MEANTIME, WERE CONGRATULATING THEMSELVES ON STILL BEING ALIVE —
NOT MUCH LEFT OF VIN'S HEADQUARTERS BY THE LOOK OF IT.
DOESN'T HELP US! I BET OUR SHIP IS A PILE OF TWISTED METAL BY NOW.

SUDDENLY, THEY FELT A TERRIBLE VIBRATION THROUGH THE GROUND . . .
WHAT THE JUPE IS IT?


IT WAS THE LAND-SPIDER! EVEN AS THEY STOOD ROOTED TO THE SPOT, EYES GAPING AT THE MONSTER, ITS SCANNERS PICKED THEM UP. UNSEEN BY THEM, WITHIN THAT MIGHTY STEEL BODY, A SUN PULSER WAS BEING ADJUSTED TO THEIR RANGE.


A MASSIVE ROCK CLOSE BY THE TWO EARTH-MEN SUDDENLY EXPLODED INTO A BILLION FRAGMENTS OF MOLTEN FIRE.


RUN FOR IT, MAX! KEEP THE ROCKS BETWEEN US AND IT!
BEHIND THEM, THE LAND-SPIDER FIRED AGAIN . . . AND AGAIN . . .

VIN'S SCANNERS HAD PICKED UP THE LAND SPIDER AND HE ORDERED FIGHTING CRAFT TO DESTROY IT.
BUT THE LAND-SPIDER HIT BACK IN A DEVASTATING MANNER—
IT CAST OUT ITS WEB OF DEATH. THE PILOT OF THE CRAFT DIED IMMEDIATELY AS POWERFUL CURRENTS SURGED THROUGH HIS BODY . . .

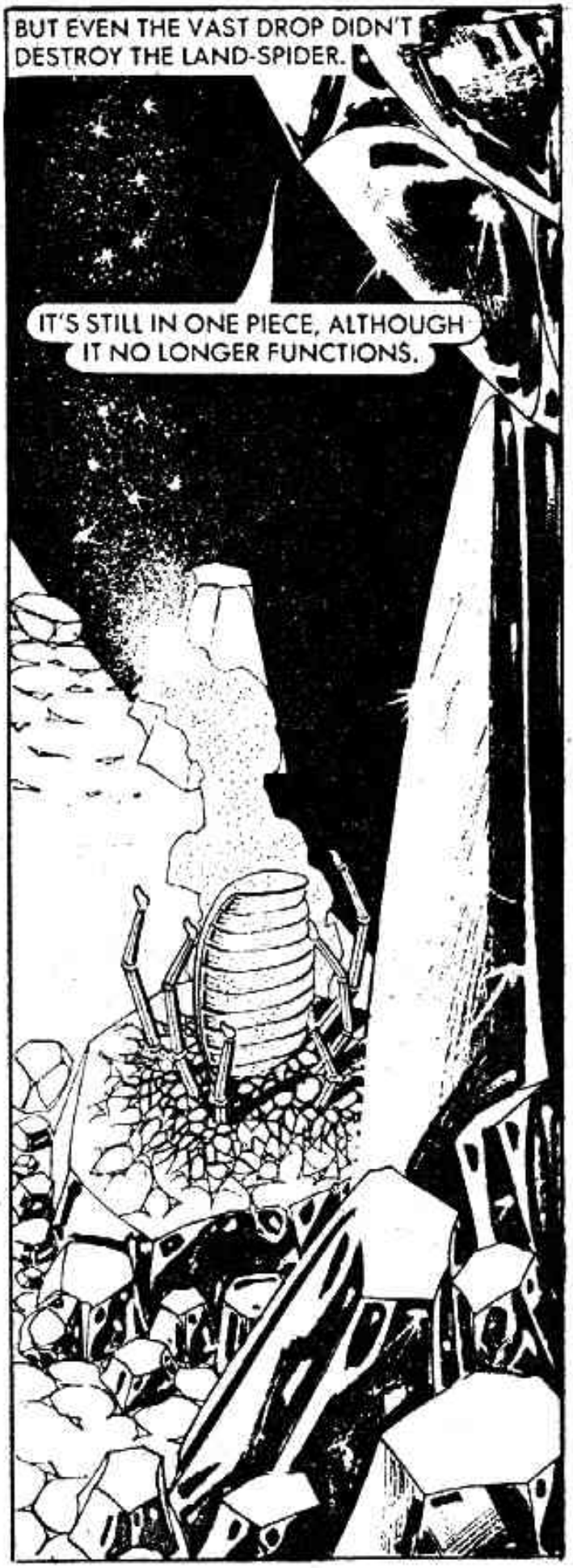
. . . SECONDS LATER, HIS CRAFT WAS DASHED TO THE GROUND, SHATTERING INTO FRAGMENTS.
EVEN VIN'S NEWEST WEAPON, THE SWARMER, PROVED USELESS AS THE LAND-SPIDER SHRUGGED OFF THEIR IMPACT.

THEY CAN'T STOP IT, NOTHING CAN. AND LOOK WHERE IT'S HEADED!
STRAIGHT TO VIN'S COMPLEX . . . AND OUR SPACE SHIP! IF OUR SHIP IS DESTROYED WE'RE TRAPPED ON THIS PLANET FOREVER!

THEY RACED ALONG THE RIDGE ON A PARALLEL COURSE WITH THE LAND-SPIDER.
MUST TRY TO TURN THE BRUTE!

TIM SPRINTED AND JUMPED—
IMMEDIATELY, THE MACHINE WENT OUT OF CONTROL—
TIME I GOT OFF!
LANDING SAFELY, HE WRENCHED OPEN A PLATE SET INTO THE LAND-SPIDER'S METAL SKIN.
NO NEED TO BE FUSSY . . . I'LL JUST TEAR THE LOT OUT!

WITH NO SENSOR SYSTEMS, IT TUMBLED FROM A CLIFF.


BUT EVEN THE VAST DROP DIDN'T DESTROY THE LAND-SPIDER.
IT'S STILL IN ONE PIECE, ALTHOUGH IT NO LONGER FUNCTIONS.

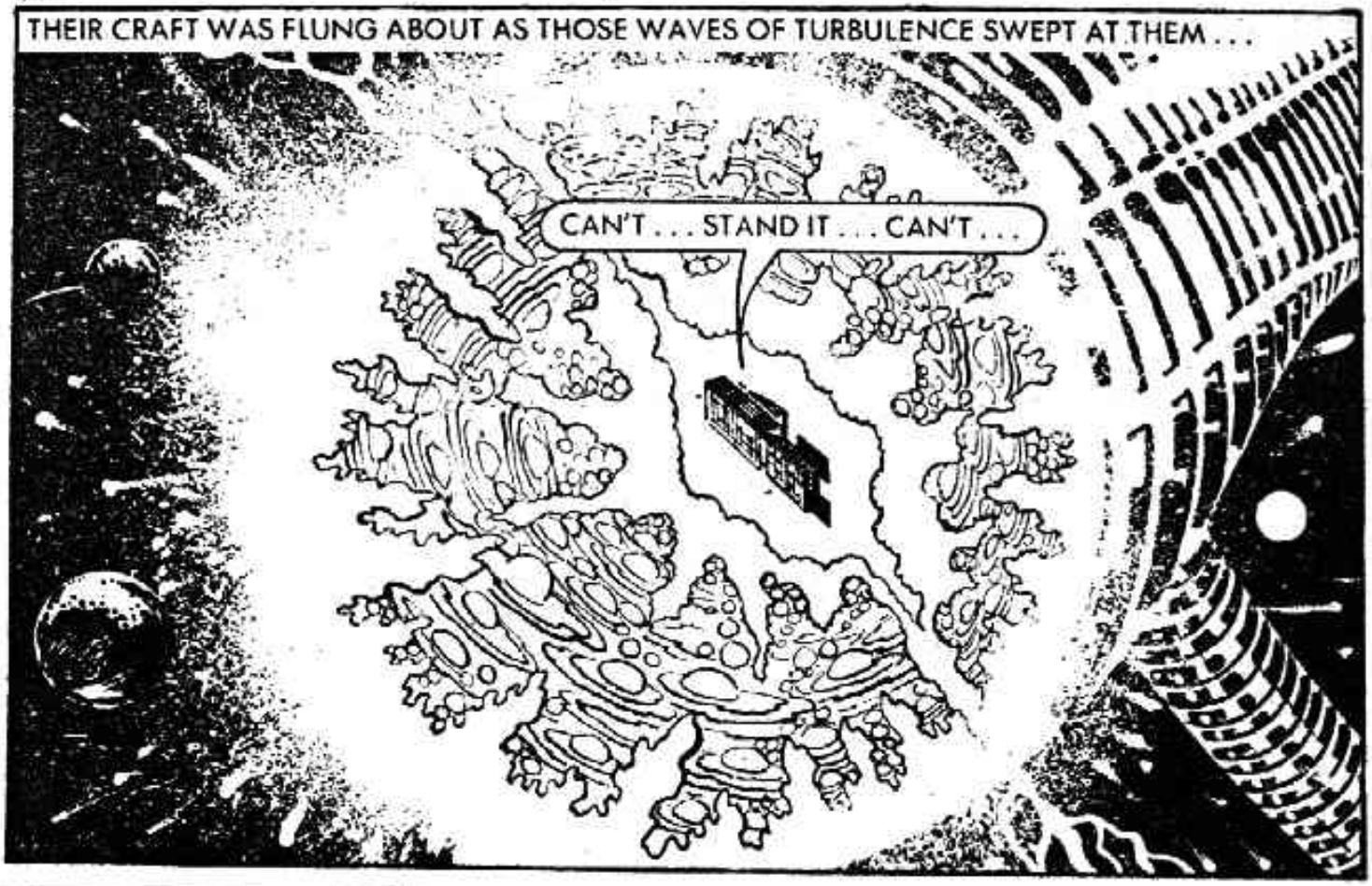
eldubya/iodinepies

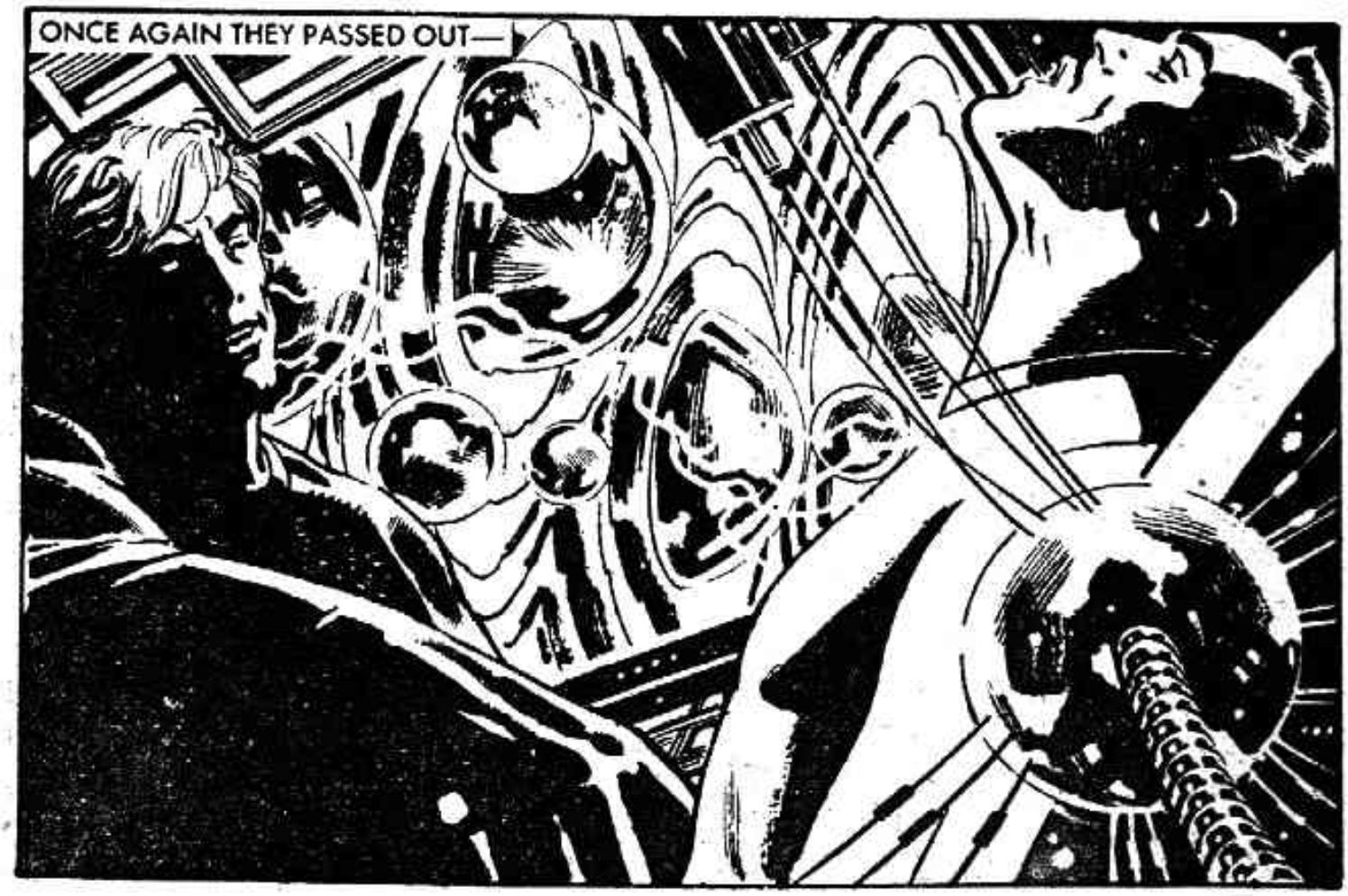
THROUGH THE TUNNEL, YOU MEAN?
EXACTLY! WE HAVE SEEDED IT. THE ENERGIES ALREADY SHOW SIGNS OF CALMING. LET THESE PRIMITIVES GO FIRST—THEY WILL SHOW US THE WAY. LET THEM ENDURE THE STRONGEST FORCES, AND WE FOLLOW IN THEIR WAKE.
I ACCEPT YOUR IDEA! LIGHT THE CRYSTAL TRAP, THEY WILL NEED A GUIDE TO THE TUNNEL ENTRANCE. MEANTIME, WE WILL BOARD OUR SHIP AND FOLLOW BEFORE THOSE CURSED SPIDER-MEN RETURN. HURRY, HURRY!
UNAWARE THAT THEY WERE BEING WATCHED, TIM AND MAX MADE FOR THEIR CRAFT—

THE CRAFT, ALTHOUGH SLIGHTLY DAMAGED, RESPONDED TO THE CONTROLS.
WE MADE IT, MAX!

THE LIGHTED CRYSTAL TRAP GLITTERED, LEADING THEM TO THE TUNNEL ENTRANCE.
KEEP YOUR EYES OFF IT, MAX . . . IT SENDS OUT A HYPNOTIC CURRENT . . .

SUDDENLY THE DIAMOND LIGHT VANISHED AS VIN'S SCIENTISTS CUT THE POWER. ALL ITS BEAUTY FADED, ITS MENACE ERASED.
THE TUNNEL LOOKS WORSE FROM THIS END!


THEIR CRAFT WAS FLUNG ABOUT AS THOSE WAVES OF TURBULENCE SWEPT AT THEM . . .
CAN'T . . . STAND IT . . . CAN'T . . .


ONCE AGAIN THEY PASSED OUT—

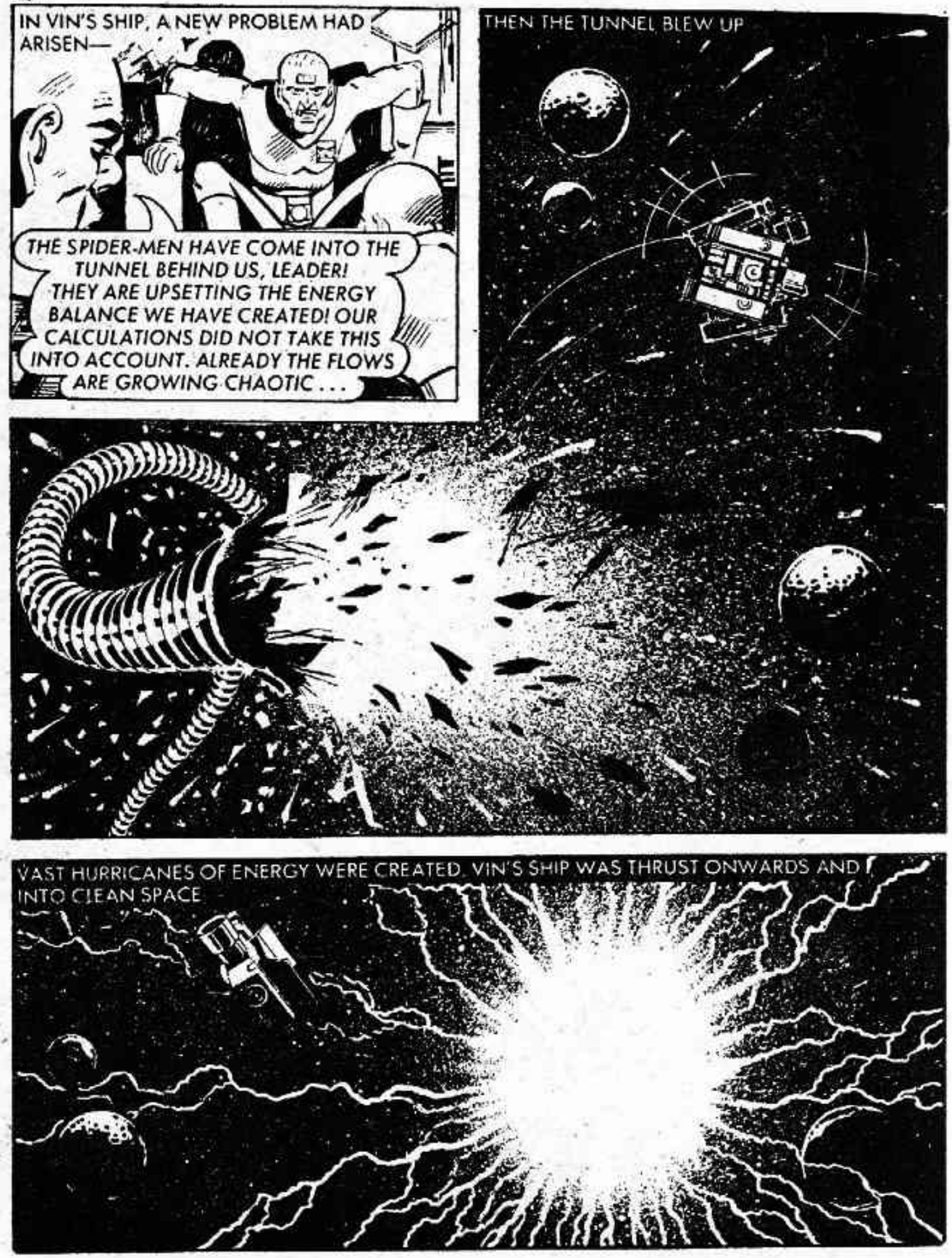
BEHIND THEM, VIN'S ESCAPE SHIP, PACKED WITH ADVANCED WEAPONRY, SCIENTISTS AND A FEW TRUSTED WARRIORS, ROSE FROM HIS PLANET FOR THE LAST TIME.
INTO THE TUNNEL QUICKLY . . . THE SPIDER-MEN ARE RETURNING. IS THE EARTH SHIP STILL INTACT?
YES, OH LEADER!

ONCE THROUGH THE TUNNEL, WE START OUR CONQUESTS! WHO CAN STOP US? THERE WILL BE POSITIONS OF POWER FOR EACH ONE OF YOU! I WILL RULE THE UNIVERSE!

BEHIND THEM, THE SPIDER-MEN MOUNTED THEIR LAST ASSAULT —
VIN HAS ESCAPED. WE WILL PURSUE HIM THROUGH THE TUNNEL OF DEATH.

BEHIND THEM THEY LEFT TOTAL DESTRUCTION, IMPREGNATING THE VERY ROCKS OF THE PLANET WITH THE DEADLY LINGERING RADIOACTIVITY OF THEIR WEAPONS.
IN THE TUNNEL TIM AND MAX KNEW NOTHING OF THAT TUMULTUOUS JOURNEY FOR THEY SPRAWLED SENSELESS IN THEIR SHIP. IN THE CALMER WAKE CAME VIN AND BEHIND THEM, THE SPIDER-MEN.

AN ENTERNITY LATER—
MAX, WE'RE THROUGH IT! LOOK . . . CALM SPACE!
BUT WHOSE SPACE? I'M WORRIED THAT WE'RE COMING OUT IN SOME TIME WARP. WHERE'S THE FLAGSHIP?
I'VE GOT THEM, TIM! I'VE RAISED THE FLAGSHIP! LET'S GO HOME.


IN VIN'S SHIP, A NEW PROBLEM HAD ARISEN—
THE SPIDER-MEN HAVE COME INTO THE TUNNEL BEHIND US, LEADER! THEY ARE UPSETTING THE ENERGY BALANCE WE HAVE CREATED! OUR CALCULATIONS DID NOT TAKE THIS INTO ACCOUNT. ALREADY THE FLOWS ARE GROWING CHAOTIC . . .
THEN THE TUNNEL BLEW UP
VAST HURRICANES OF ENERGY WERE CREATED. VIN'S SHIP WAS THRUST ONWARDS AND INTO CLEAN SPACE

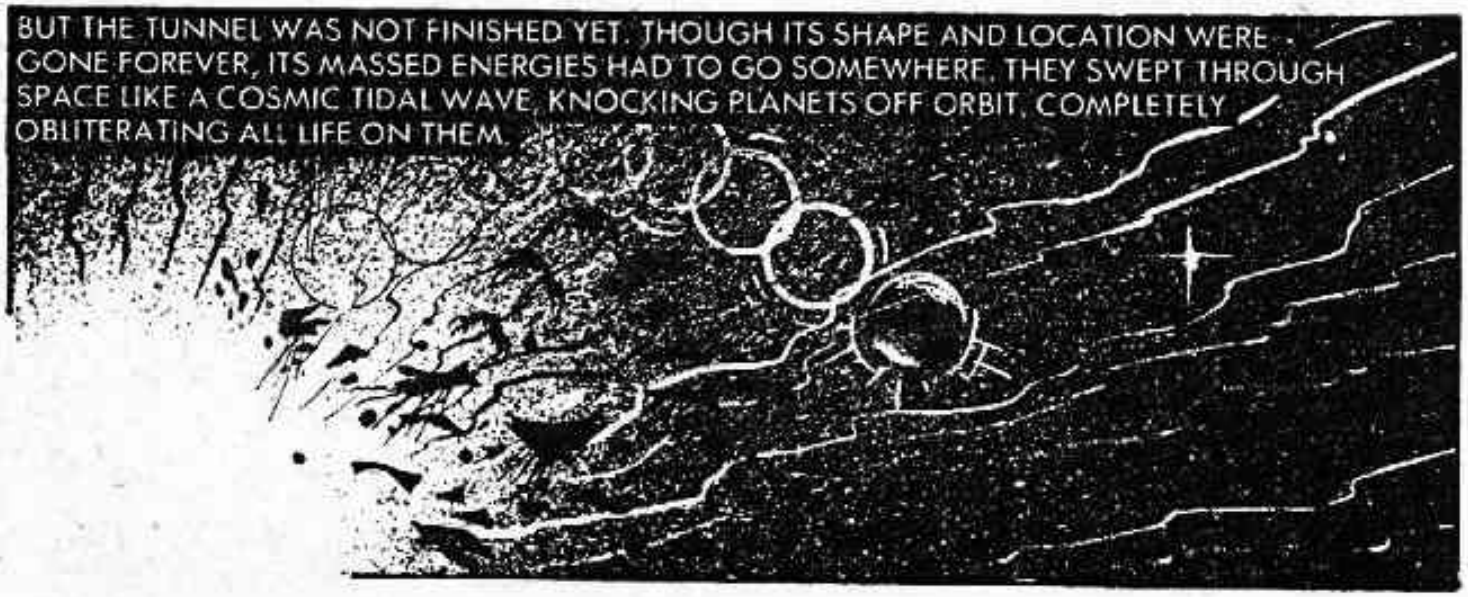
THE SPIDER-MEN WERE NOT SO LUCKY—

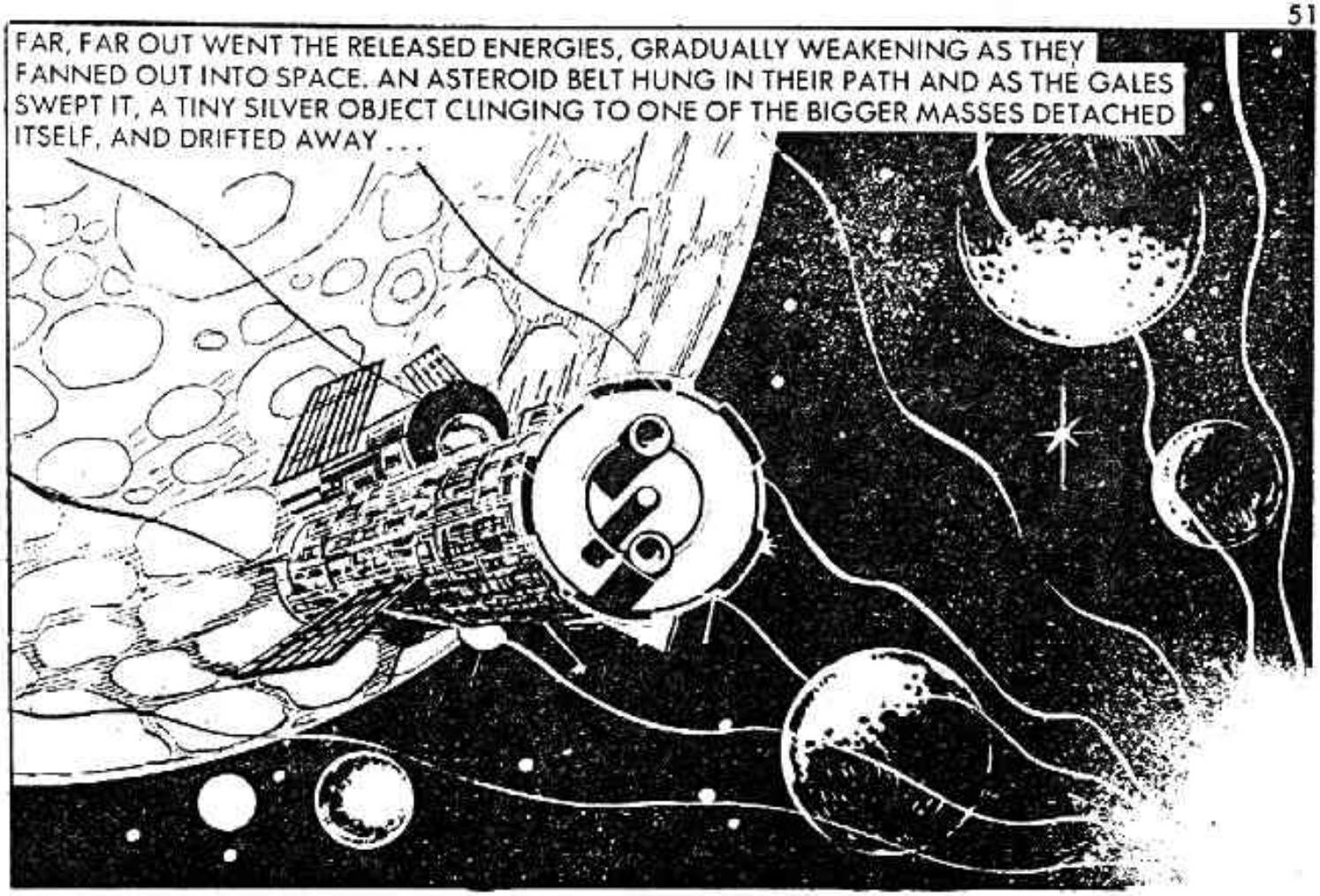
AS THE DAZED AND BATTERED CREW REGAINED THEIR FEET—

LEADER . . . THE SHIP IS IN DANGER! THE METAL OF ITS SIDES WAS SAVAGED BY THAT EXPLOSION . . .

WHAT? WHAT? REPAIR THE DAMAGE, DOLT!

TIM AND MAX WERE PICKED UP BY THE FLAG-SHIP —
IN THE SICK BAY —
THOUGHT WE'D SEEN THE LAST OF YOU TWO.
THOUGHT SO TOO, SIR. OUR GUESS IS THE ENEMY WAS DESTROYED WHEN THE TUNNEL BLEW UP. WE LOST ALL SIGHT OF THEM IN OUR SCANNERS.


BUT THE TUNNEL WAS NOT FINISHED YET. THOUGH ITS SHAPE AND LOCATION WERE GONE FOREVER, ITS MASSED ENERGIES HAD TO GO SOMEWHERE. THEY SWEPT THROUGH SPACE LIKE A COSMIC TIDAL WAVE, KNOCKING PLANETS OFF ORBIT, COMPLETELY OBLITERATING ALL LIFE ON THEM.

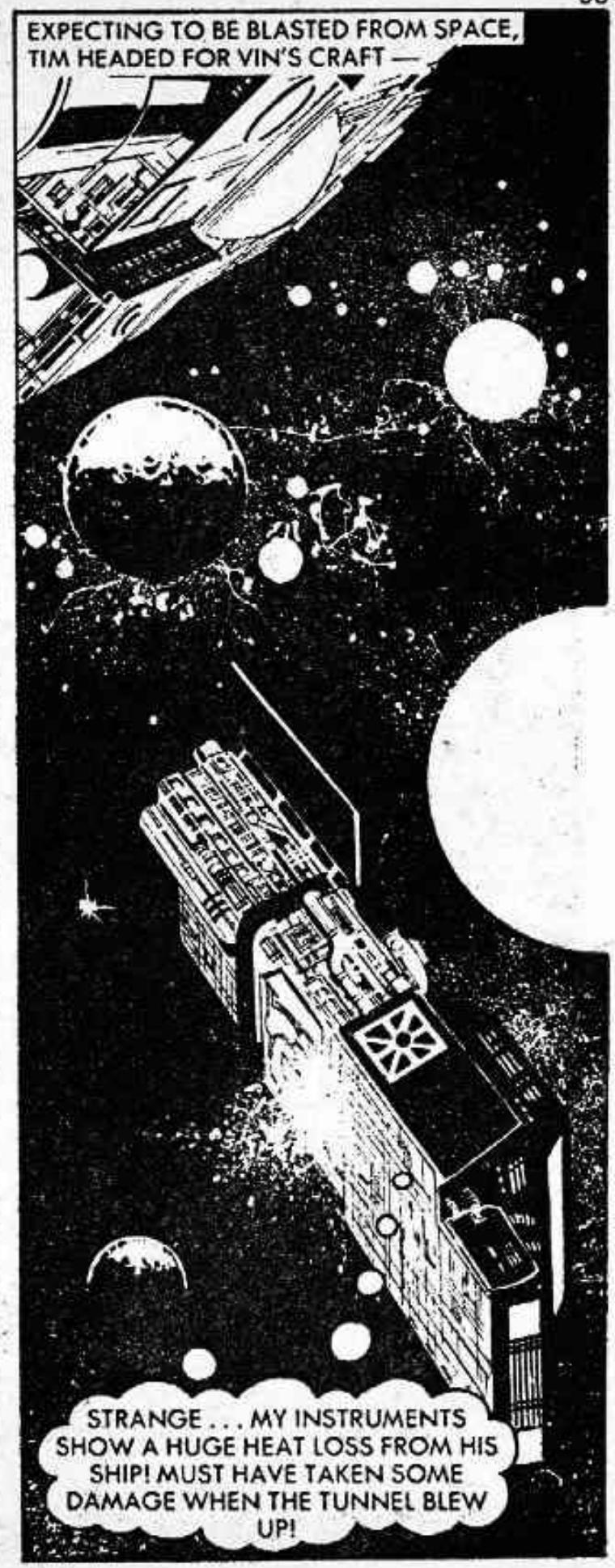

FAR, FAR OUT WENT THE RELEASED ENERGIES, GRADUALLY WEAKENING AS THEY FANNED OUT INTO SPACE. AN ASTEROID BELT HUNG IN THEIR PATH AND AS THE GALES SWEPT IT, A TINY SILVER OBJECT CLINGING TO ONE OF THE BIGGER MASSES DETACHED ITSELF, AND DRIFTED AWAY . . .

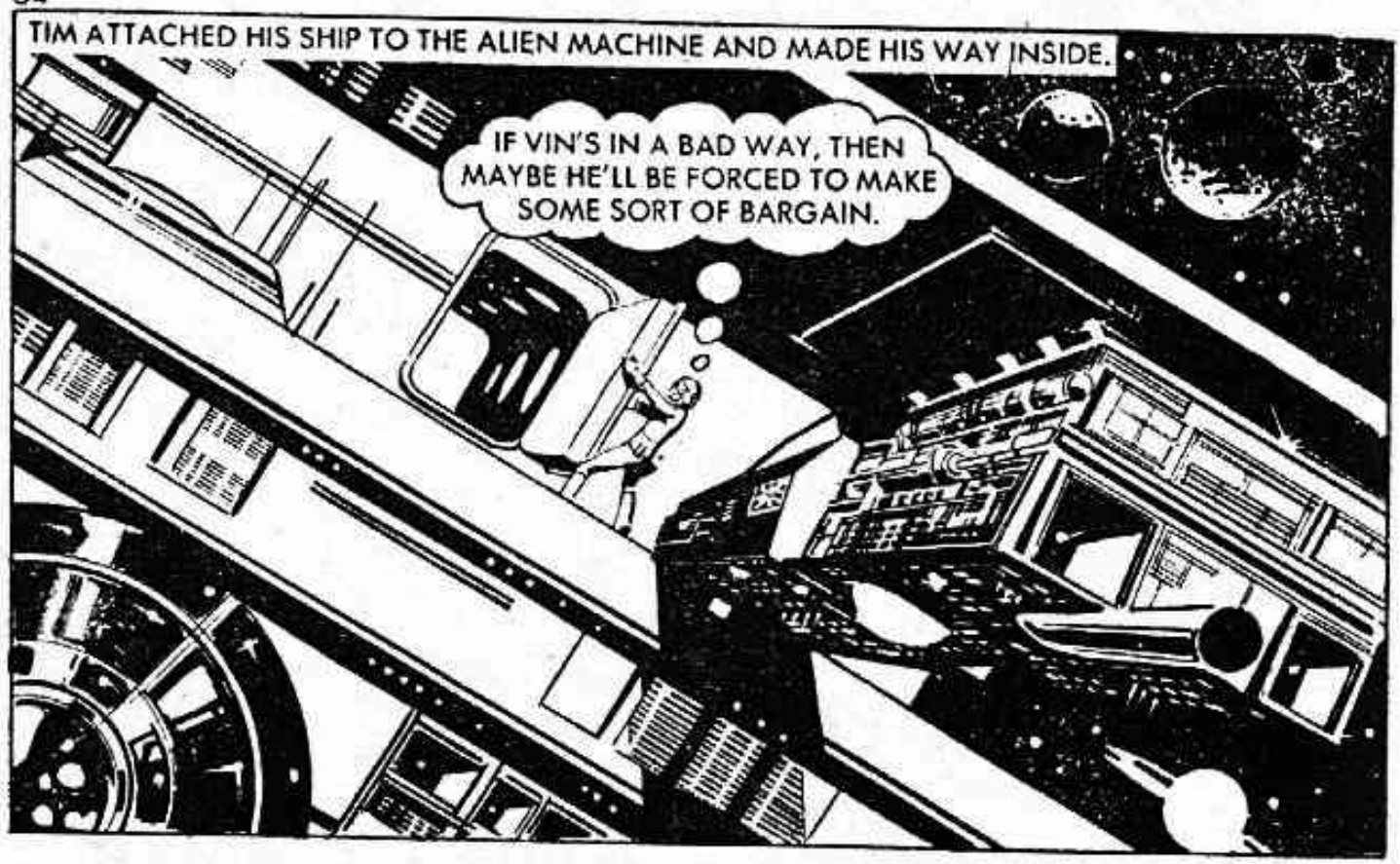
MANY LIGHT YEARS AWAY ON THE FLAGSHIP —
WILL CAPTAIN RYAN PLEASE REPORT TO THE BRIDGE AT ONCE!

MEANTIME, VIN PACED HIS CONTROL CABIN, CURSING HIS SCIENTISTS FOR TAKING SO LONG TO REPAIR THE SHIP.
BUT, LEADER, WE CANNOT REPAIR IT . . . NOT OUT HERE! THE VERY FABRIC OF THE SHIP IS SPLITTING . . . WE MUST ABANDON THE CRAFT, TRUST TO THE LIFEBOATS!

REMOVE HIM! TELL MY OTHER SCIENTISTS TO GET THE WORK DONE!
I OBEY, OH LEADER!
ON SEAGULL, TIM AND COMMANDER TOR STARED AT A VIDEO SCREEN.
NO QUESTION, SIR, IT'S VIN! THEY GOT THROUGH THE TUNNEL.

NO DOUBT OF IT, SIR! WITH YOUR PERMISSION, I'LL GET OVER THERE AND TRY TO PARLEY. DON'T HOLD OUT MUCH HOPE BUT I HONESTLY CAN'T THINK OF ANYTHING ELSE TO DO.
I SUPPOSE IT'S THE ONLY ANSWER.


EXPECTING TO BE BLASTED FROM SPACE, TIM HEADED FOR VIN'S CRAFT —
STRANGE . . . MY INSTRUMENTS SHOW A HUGE HEAT LOSS FROM HIS SHIP! MUST HAVE TAKEN SOME DAMAGE WHEN THE TUNNEL BLEW UP!


TIM ATTACHED HIS SHIP TO THE ALIEN MACHINE AND MADE HIS WAY INSIDE.
IF VIN'S IN A BAD WAY, THEN MAYBE HE'LL BE FORCED TO MAKE SOME SORT OF BARGAIN.

INSIDE THE SHIP...
ARE THEY ALL DEAD?

HE REACHED THE CONTROL DECK WHERE THE SAVAGE LEADER SAT IN HIS MASSIVE CHAIR, EYES GLAZED, HIS BREATH COMING IN HOARSE GASPS.
YOU SURVIVED, THEN?
WHAT HAPPENED HERE?

MY SHIP SUFFERED SHIELDING DAMAGE. SLOWLY ALL THE HEAT AND AIR DRAINS AWAY. SOON I SHALL GO THE SAME WAY AS MY CREW, UNLESS YOU CAN ASSIST?
YES! PUT THE BLASTER DOWN AND I'LL TAKE YOU BACK.

YOU AGREE? YOUR WORD ON IT?
NOT YET! GIVE ME THAT WEAPON, VIN. THEN I'LL TAKE YOU TO THE FLAGSHIP.

YOU LIE! YOU THINK I DON'T RECOGNISE THE HATE IN YOUR EYES. YOU PLAN TO KILL ME, ISN'T THAT SO?
HK 54
ABOARD SEAGULL, MAX STOOD WITH COMMANDER TOR, WATCHING THE SMALL SHIP THAT WAS HEADING GENTLY TOWARDS THE FLAGSHIP.
MAGNIFY IT! IT COULD BE ONE OF VIN'S TRICKS!

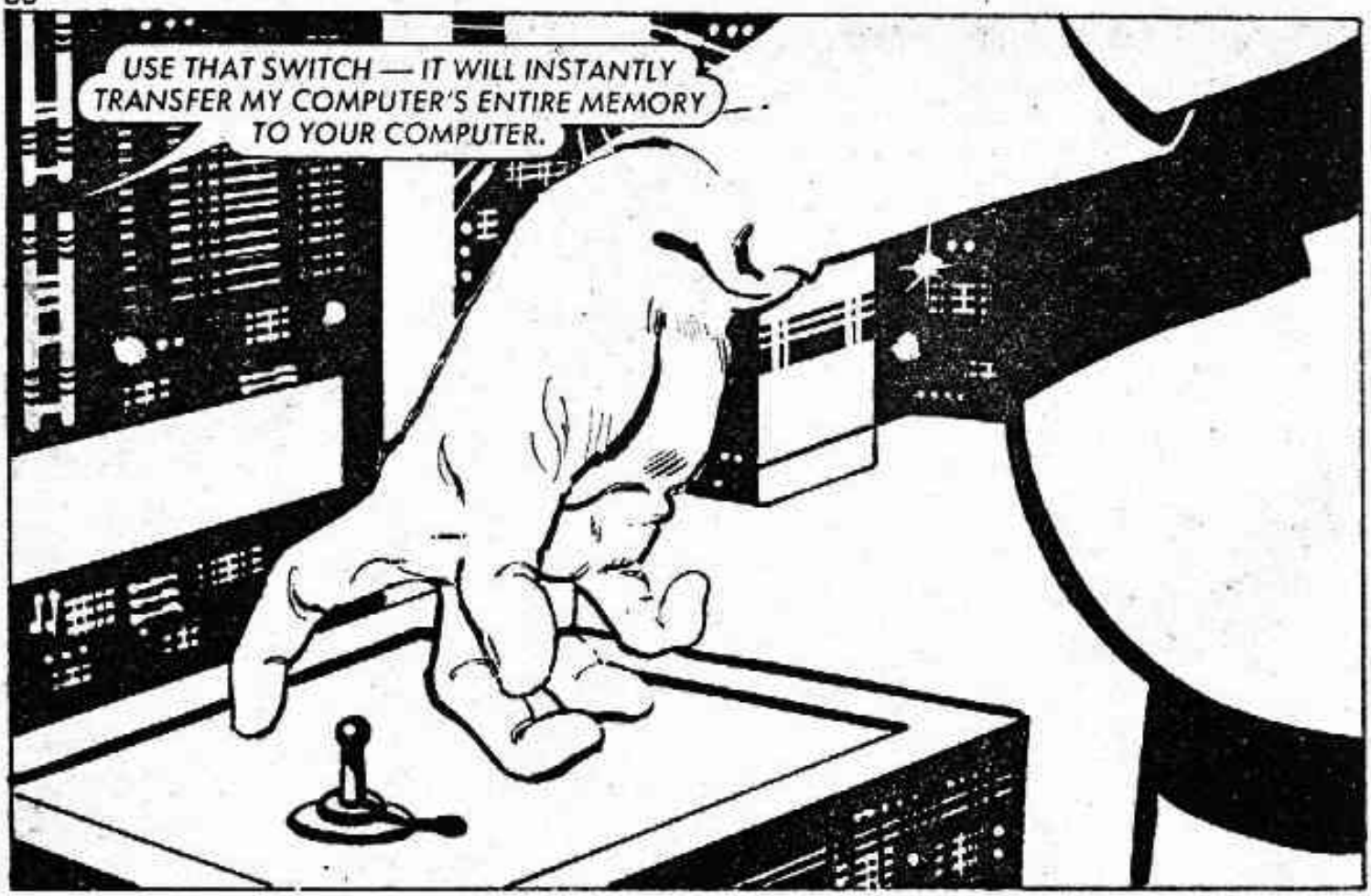
THE MAGNIFICATION SHARPENED THE PICTURE OF THE OCCUPANT OF THE SPACE SHIP —
OH, NO . . . NOT TIM!!
BUT . . . BUT THAT WASN'T THE SHIP HE USED. SIR, IT'S . . . WELL, IT'S AN OLD-FASHIONED EARTH SHIP. A MARK 6 SCOUTER —
GET THAT CRAFT ABOARD!
AYE, SIR!

AT THAT MOMENT —
RYAN CALLING SEAGULL, VIN IS THE SOLE SURVIVOR HERE . . . BUT HE'S ILL.
THAT'S TIM!
THEN WHO . . . WHO IS THAT IN THE SPACE CRAFT?

UNAWARE, TIM CONTINUED
METAL'S UNSTABLE . . . CHEMICAL BONDING BUILDING UP PRESSURE TO EXPLOSIVE LEVEL.
THEN GET OUT OF THERE!

TIM'S SURVIVAL GEAR SAVED HIM FROM THE POISONOUS EFFECTS OF THE DEADLY FUMES THAT FILLED THIS STRICKEN SHIP.
THIS SHIP IS PACKED WITH HIGHLY-ADVANCED TECHNOLOGY . . . IT WOULD BE A WASTE TO LET IT GO. CAN'T YOU SEND OVER SOME TECHNICIANS TO TAKE THE STUFF OVER TO SEAGULL?
EARTHMAN . . .

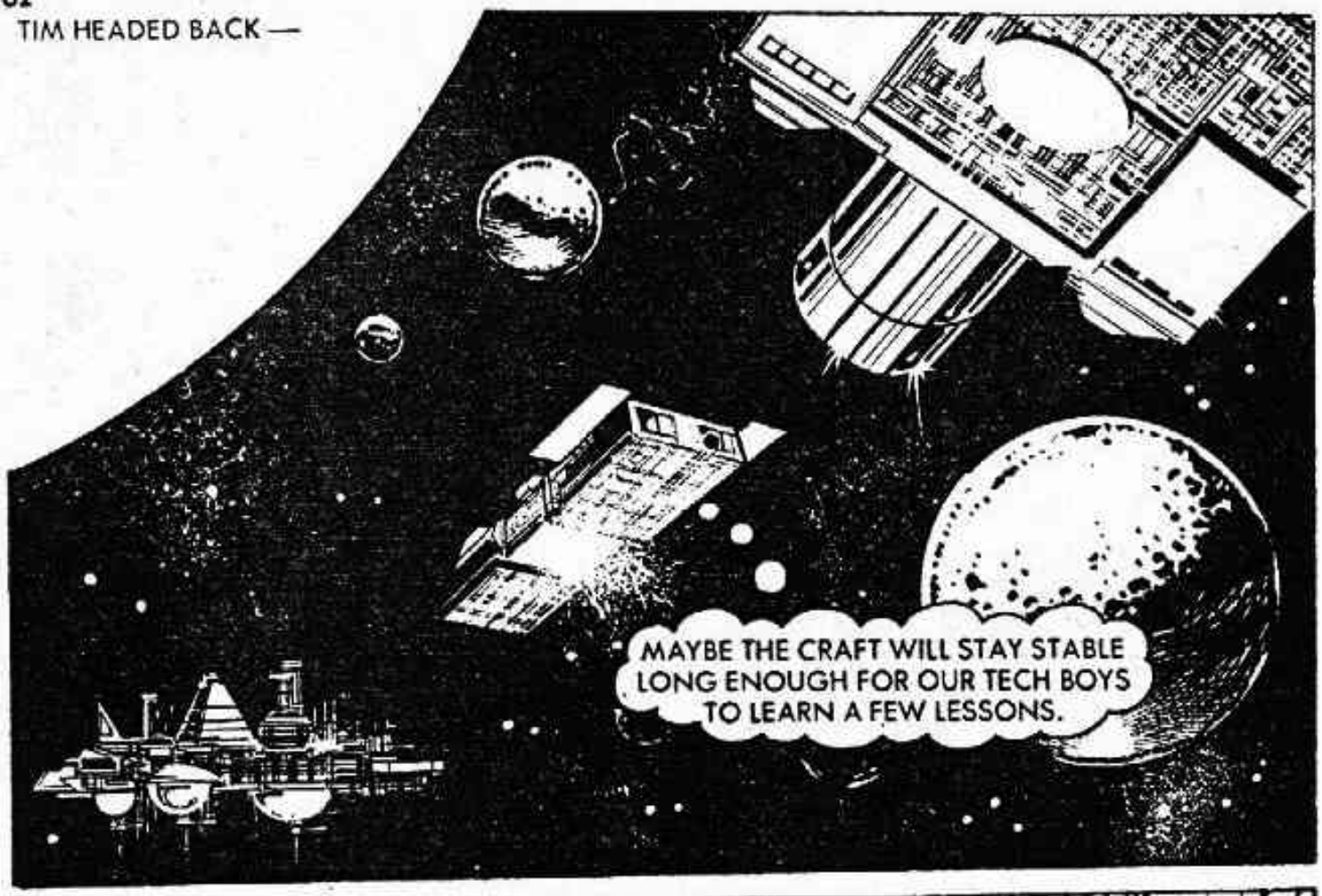
WHAT IS IT?
SAVE ME . . . SAVE MY LIFE. MY SHIP IS YOURS . . . ALL ITS SECRETS. ALL I ASK FOR IS MY LIFE.

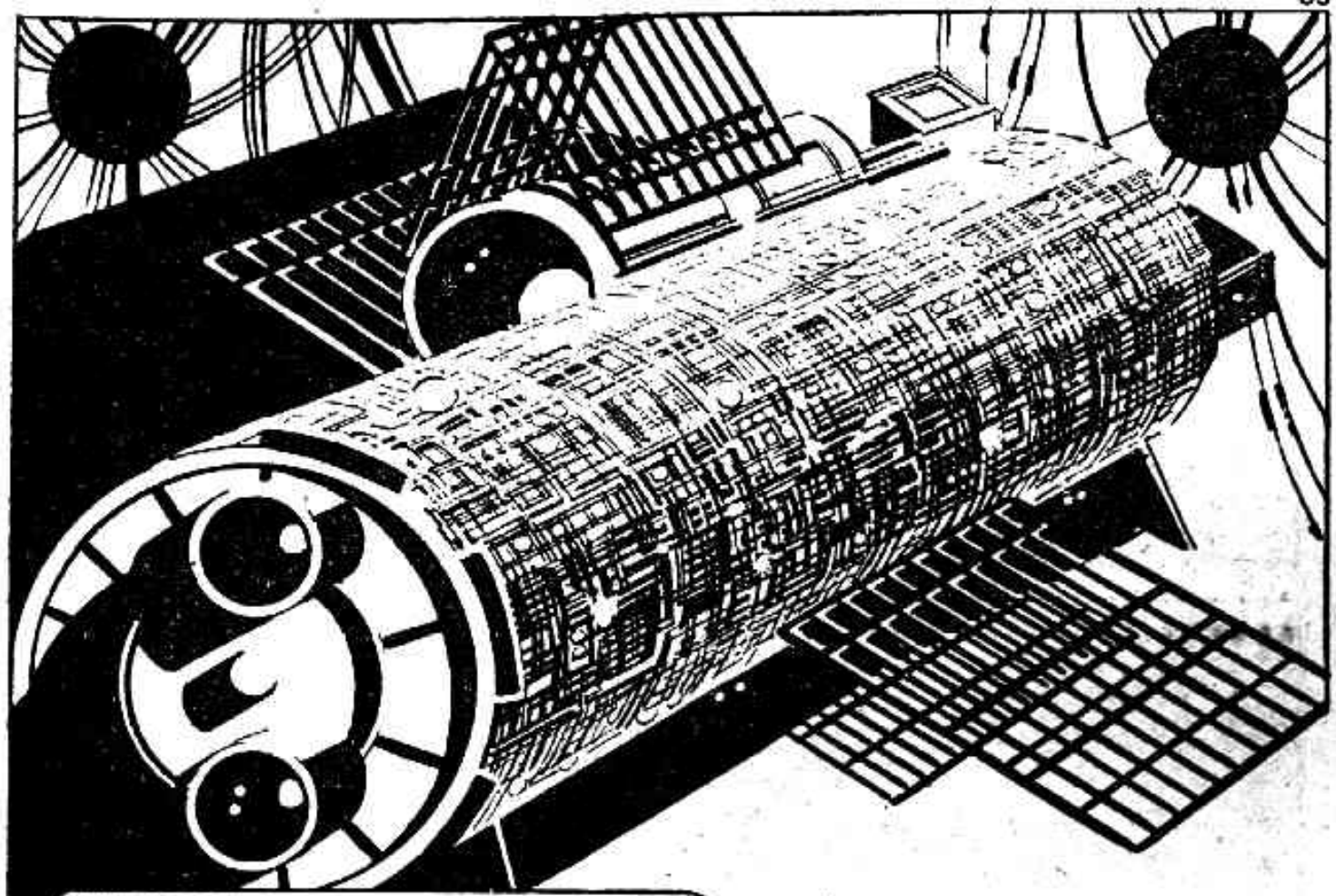

USE THAT SWITCH — IT WILL INSTANTLY TRANSFER MY COMPUTER'S ENTIRE MEMORY TO YOUR COMPUTER.

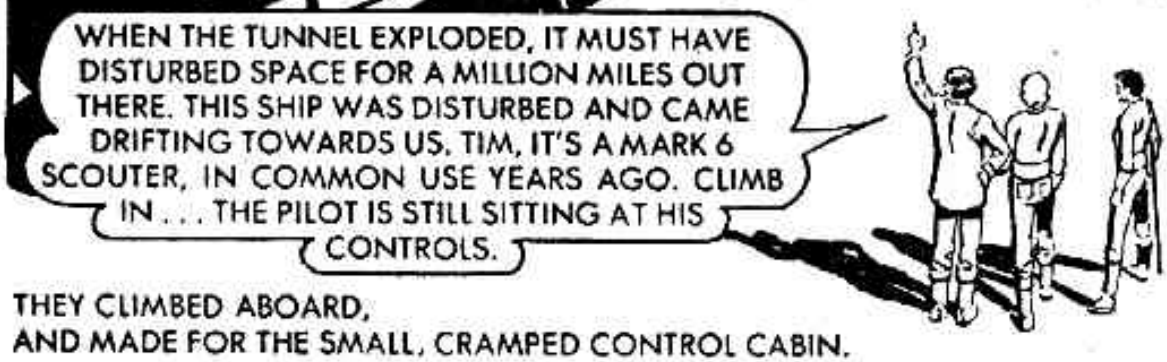
ANYBODY CAN BE AFRAID! VIN IS . . . HE WANTS TO LIVE, THOUGH I'M SURE HE'S PAST SAVING.
TIM, THIS IS COMMANDER TOR! FORGET THE SHIP! COME ABOARD! WE'LL WAIT TWELVE HOURS AND IF VIN'S SHIP DOESN'T EXPLODE IN THAT TIME, I'LL PROBE IT AND POSSIBLY TAKE IT IN. BUT YOU COME BACK NOW! THAT'S AN ORDER!

DOGS!! THEY DEFY ME . . . VIN, WHO RULED PLANETS, SYSTEMS, WHOSE EVERY WORD WAS LAW! THEY TREAT ME LIKE SOME RUBBISH TO BE LEFT . . . I . . . I'LL . . .
BUT BEFORE HE COULD THROW THE SWITCH —
HE'S DEAD!

TIM HEADED BACK —







THEY CLIMBED ABOARD,
AND MADE FOR THE SMALL, CRAMPED CONTROL CABIN.

EARTH LOST CONTACT WITH HIM MANY YEARS AGO. HE MUST HAVE DRIFTED OUT THIS WAY AND DIED ON THE JOURNEY. ALL THIS TIME THE CRAFT HAS BEEN HELD BY THE GRAVITATIONAL PULL OF SOME PLANET. THE TUNNEL BLOWING UP FREED HIM.
ANYTHING . . . ANYTHING IN THE SHIP'S LOG?
YES . . . MESSAGES TO HIS FAMILY . . . YOUR FATHER, MOTHER. TO YOU. THEY'RE ALL IN YOUR CABIN. DISMISSED, TIM! YOU AND MAX ARE ON SHIPBOARD LEAVE FOR A FULL WEEK.
AND . . . HIS SHIP, SIR? WHAT'S TO HAPPEN TO IT. AND HIM?

WE'LL LET THE SHIP GO . . . GULL WAS A FANATIC ABOUT SPACE . . . HE WOULDN'T HAVE WANTED TO COME TO HIS REST ON ANYTHING AS DULL AS A PLANET. LET HIM DRIFT ON. AGREE?
YES, SIR. I . . . I THINK THAT IS BEST.
MINUTES LATER, VIN'S CRIPPLED SHIP BLEW UP. IT VANISHED IN A SAVAGE GOUT OF FIRE, ITS DEBRIS FALLING AWAY INTO SPACE.

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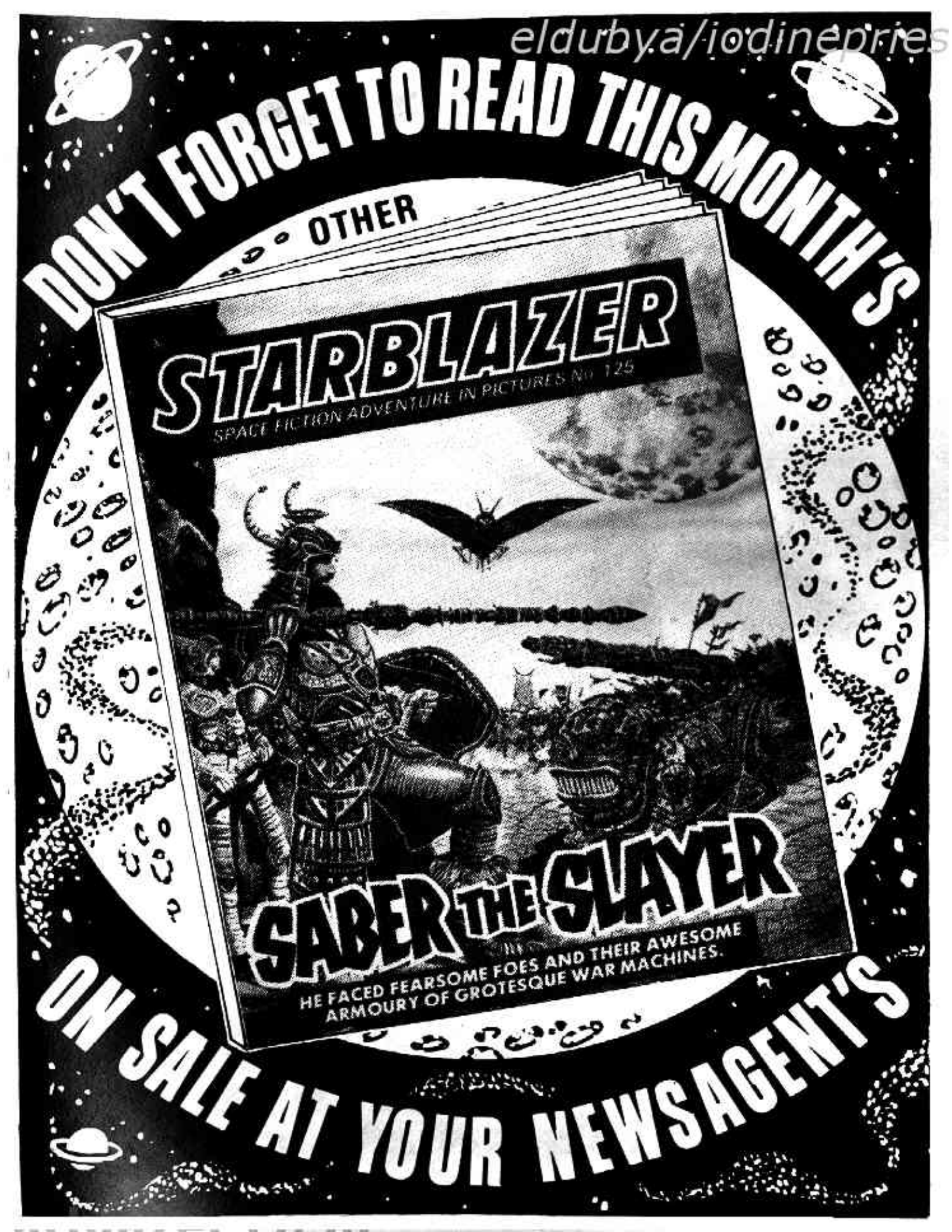

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Along with Borman and Lovell, who had already been in space, Major William Alison Anders, 35, USAF became the first men to fly to the Moon, on the Apollo 8 orbiter launched December 21, 1968. The mission lasted 6 days 3 hours 0 min 42 secs, and included ten orbits of the moon. Anders retired from the space programme and after various USAF appointments moved into the aircraft industry.